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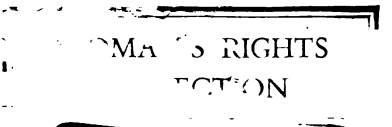

F. H. Luscomb

THE WOMAN WHO DARES

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BY

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3 W

TO

Women, everywhere,

WHO ARE SEEKING TO BE JUST THAT THEY MAY BE TRUE,

BY

ONE OF THEM

THE WOMAN WHO DARES.

CHAPTER I.

Two young girls stood facing each other in a chamber whose windows looked out upon the peaceful serenity which surrounds a suburban home.

One held the other's hand in her own, and gazed at the slender arm, which was encircled with four red bands just above the wrist—bracelets stamped in the flesh by cruel fingers. Slowly her gaze lifted to the other's face, which was downcast and pale, while her eyes sought to find and hold the sad ones that seemed to have no inclination to raise themselves.

Her questioning look gradually changed to one of conviction, the quickened blood flamed in her cheeks as she exclaimed :

"It is your father who has done this, Murva ! What does it mean ? Tell me quickly ! " And she impetuously grasped her shoulder and shook it slightly in her eagerness for an answer.

The one addressed as Murva half-raised her head and opened her lips as if to speak, but hesitated, and attempted to withdraw her hand from the other's grasp. Her friend but clasped it the closer, while she threw her arm round her and said :

"Oh, Murva, tell me ! You always tell me everything. I know it is your father, you poor, persecuted child !

All your loyalty does not and cannot keep people from knowing what a tyrant he is. I wish he was dead, I do! and I do not care if it is wicked. Why should he spend his life in making other people miserable? Why should——"

But Murva's disengaged hand was over the speaker's lips and cut short the torrent of words ready to flow forth.

"Hush, Kate! You must not speak so of my father. I never forget that he is my father, whatever happens, or that I owe myself unceasing recognition of what is due to him."

"Well, Murva dear, you are one of the few who are able to act from principle instead of from feeling. I could not in your case. You have been tyrannised over ever since you were a baby, and how you have endured till now I cannot see. But, tell me, what provoked your father's wrath this time, that I find you shut up in your room like a refractory child, though you are twenty years old, and with these marks on your arm which show the grip of his hand?"

"You know," Murva replied, with the evident effort to be just in what she should say, "father cannot understand that one who loves books wants them for his own. He considers the money spent for them wasted, because there is the public library from which all that is necessary could be procured, and he does not think much reading essential. He says time is money, and when you waste the first you waste the other. You know, dear, we cannot all see things alike," and she patted her friend's cheek with a caressing gesture which Kate understood. "So I did not wish him to know how I had used the money your mother gave me on my last birthday; and when he asked me what I had done

with it and I said I would rather not tell, he grasped my arm in his anger, and more violently than he was probably aware of, demanding that I answer his question. So I had to tell him, and then he took my books and locked them up, besides forbidding me to leave my room to-day."

As she ceased speaking the slight animation which her protest to her friend's speech had brought to her face died out, and she sank slowly into a chair by the window, looking out of it as she did so with an expression which seemed to be habitual to her—a yearning for something afar off, a patient non-resistance to something nearer home.

Kate watched her silently for a moment before she said, "Murva, you are a marvel to me! How you bear all you do I cannot understand. I should have run away from home long ago. I could not live in such bondage; I must have freedom."

"Freedom!" burst out Murva, starting again to her feet, her eyes kindling, and her whole form quivering with the intensity of her feeling. "O, Kate! With all my heart and soul, mind and strength, I long for freedom! Long for the time to come when I can draw one free breath; for I never have—never once in all these long, lonely years. O, will they never come to an end? Shall I never have the chance to be myself?"

She stood with her arms stretched up and out before her, the embodiment of intense longing, while the tears started to Kate's eyes as she watched her. For a moment only she stood thus, and then said gently, "But I must do what is right! Whatever comes, that is what I must do, is it not, Kate?"

"But there may be differing opinions as to what is

right," burst out Kate. "I do firmly believe your father thinks himself next to our Heavenly One in his claim to absolute, uncompromising obedience; and I hardly think he even excepts Him. The way he will glare at you if you show the slightest symptoms of opposition to his views and start up with a 'Will you attempt to argue with *me?*' would be ridiculous if it were not so dreadful, for you who are in his power. Oh, I should like to tell him what I thought of him just once, and I believe I will yet."

"Kate! Kate! Do not dream of speaking in any such way to my father. It would accomplish nothing and he would forbid you the house."

"I would come in spite of him then,—so now!" flashed Kate. "Obedience! What is it? Of course you owe your father proper and reasonable obedience: but this slavish submission which he exacts is contrary to the dignity of human nature. He takes from you the right to your own individuality. That is tyranny, despotism; and resistance to the demands of a despot is obedience to something higher."

"O, Kate, you are my little comfort, dear and precious! But you could not come here if my father once forbade it; my stepmother would not open the door to you, and I should not dare to; and then I should be deprived of my greatest joy, do you not see?"

And Murva drew her fiery little champion down beside her, gazing into her eyes with such a sad longing in her own that Kate could only wind her arm closer around her and tell her over and over again how sorry she was for her, and propose one plan after another to relieve her from her thralldom; plans as impetuous and impossible as most of the plans of this young person were when she was up in arms.

But Murva said firmly, "No, Kate; there is but one course for me to take, and that is to remain here in my father's house and render him the obedience he demands, as best I can, waiting patiently for the day to come when I shall be of age and free to choose for myself what I will do then. It will not be so very long now."

"No! Thank heaven! Murva," her friend replied, "your twenty-first birthday is coming, is but a few months off now, and then you can claim your freedom. Your father cannot deprive you of it any longer. You will be legally free to do as you please, go where you like; and everyone who knows you will shout hurrah! for you, and I loudest of all. Remember: On the day you are twenty-one years old, you are coming to me—father and mother expect you—and our house is to be your home until you are provided with a better one."

"Kate!" said Murva suddenly, "sometimes I am afraid that when that day comes I shall not have the courage to face my father boldly and say, 'Now I am free to choose my own way of life, and I cannot remain longer under your roof.' My heart trembles when I think of it, for I know he will not accept the situation quietly, will not consider his authority over me as, by any means, at an end. I know, too, that he loves me in his way, and when he sees me leave his house his feeling will not be altogether regret that his dominion over me is at an end. There will be something fatherly in it after all."

Kate jumped quickly to her feet and planted herself squarely in front of Murva, the better to emphasise what she had to say.

"Now look here, Murva Kroom! Don't you tell me

there is the least doubt of your taking advantage of your opportunity when it comes, and getting away from this horrible life and having some comfort and enjoyment at last; if you do, I'll shake you."

And Kate straightened herself defiantly and looked sharply at Murva as if to detect in her face any lurking suspicion of her being able to carry out her threat if she tried.

"As if you had not been badgered and worried and abused till you look as if you had but precious little life left in you and what you have wouldn't stay long. What chance have you ever had to enjoy yourself like other girls? Half the time you have not been allowed to go anywhere but to church, and when you did you could not dance because your father would never permit it. He does not approve of dancing, forsooth! No! That is an exceedingly sinful and demoralising occupation. Why? Because *he* says so. Is not that enough? He approves of giving you plenty of work to do instead. He thinks only of keeping your fingers busy, and does not realise how much busier your mind may be with thoughts that are not very complimentary to him and would stir him up slightly if he knew them. Look at the pile of mending you have got to do as a cheerful solace to your imprisonment."

And Kate caught up the large basket and dumped it upon the floor in a manner that testified to the very slight regard she had for its contents, seating herself in the chair upon which it had rested.

"Look at that sock now!" said she, seizing the mate to a dark grey woollen one which Murva had taken up and resumed mending. "Isn't there a perfect resemblance in that thing to your father? It is long and lank, dull, dark, and disagreeable, and decidedly prickly

and uncomfortable when you come in contact with it; just like him!" and she tossed it disdainfully into the basket.

Murva looked at Kate imploringly, with the tears standing in her eyes: for she could not bear to hear her father so spoken of, even by her friend Kate, though she knew the words were true. Little respect as she had for the man—and how could it be otherwise?—she clung to her father. She must love something; it was the flowing forth of her nature which could not be entirely stopped though it might be turned into other channels did others offer.

"Now, Murva, promise me that on the day you are twenty-one years old, you will come to me; will live with me until someone who has a right carries you away to a home of your own!" And, pulling the stocking from Murva's hands, she sent it after its companion, and seizing them in her own, held them tightly and insisted, "Come! promise me!"

But Murva shook her head and said, "No, Kate; I cannot promise to do what you wish, though it is like your own generous self. When I leave my father's house I shall take some situation which will enable me to earn my own living. Independence, secured by my own efforts, will be inexpressibly dear to me, and I shall count myself one of the happiest girls alive, when I am in that position. It will be nothing to work hard, if, when the day is over, I can be mistress of my time, and spend it as I like without interference from anyone. It will be a little heaven to be able to sit down quietly with my books and not have to dread angry looks and unreasonable commands. Perhaps, after all, Kate, when I get my freedom, I shall be so overwhelmed with the novelty of it I shall not know

what to do with it." And she smiled with a doubt that was half real and but half assumed.

"Nonsense, Murva! By the time you have been able to be yourself six weeks nobody will recognise you. You will grow so strong and brave and become so formidable that perhaps even I shall be afraid of you. You shall devour your books in peace and make yourself as much of a 'blue' as you like, only you are too good and sweet ever to become a disagreeable one. And even if you will not promise to stay with us, you shall come for a time and get thoroughly rested and fitted to begin your battle with life on your own account; and you know father and mother and Donald will do everything they can to help you." And Kate soothed and petted her friend like the loving, sympathising little soul that she was.

"O, Kate, you said, when you first came, you had something to tell me, and I had forgotten it till now. What is it, dear? Is it about you and Donald?"

Kate began to blush and sparkle in a way that quite prepared Murva for what was coming. She took Kate's face between her hands and looked lovingly into her eyes. "I know what it is," she said, quietly; "you are engaged. Is it not so?"

"Yes, Murva dear, and I am so happy. And father and mother have consented, for you know they like Donald very much. How could anyone help liking him?" she added proudly.

"Not many, I think, Kate," said Murva; "I believe he is a good, true man, and will make you a faithful husband. God bless you, dear, and make you as happy as you desire to be." And she kissed her fondly and fervently. "And have you decided when the wedding is to be?"

"Yes, sometime in October, for Donald does not want to wait long, and he has consented to live with father and mother, for a time at least, because they could not bear to be parted entirely from me. And in the latter part of September is your twenty-first birthday, Murva, and you will be free. Free! Do you hear?" with an expressive squeeze. "And then you will come to us and stay until I am married, won't you, dear?" said Kate imploringly, "for you know I will have no one but you for a bridesmaid."

"Yes, Kate, I will do that with all my heart; I wish I could do more for you," replied Murva.

"That's my own darling," said Kate, jumping to her feet; "and now I must bid you good-bye and run home again, for Donald is coming this afternoon. If it were not for that I would stay with you all day. Your poor little pale face will haunt me all the afternoon. I should like to stay until we heard your father come home to-night, and then go boldly downstairs and say quietly, 'Good-evening, Mr. Kroom! I have been spending the day with Murva. I have had a delightful time,' and then walk off before he had a chance to do anything but glare at me. Would it not be fun?" And Kate laughed so merrily that her presence in Murva's room was in danger of being revealed at once.

"Now I must go, but I shall come again to-morrow, for you will probably be so busy you will not have time to come to me, even if you are not punished for some fresh offence. I hope I can get out of the house without being seen by your stepmother, for she does not like me very well and, I am sure, I reciprocate her feeling heartily, which I think she is aware of; and if she knows I have been up here she will not be any sweeter to you in consequence. Good-bye, dear, and

don't be sad any more. It is only a little over four months now to your birthday."

"Good-bye, Kate: tell Donald I wish him all happiness possible, and I am very glad he is so good about not leaving your father and mother. Good-bye, dear," and with a parting hug, Kate opened the door softly, closed it behind her without any unlucky squeak, and started down the stairs, treading as lightly as possible, almost holding her breath in her desire, for Murva's sake, to get out of the house without Mrs. Kroom's knowledge.

But she was not to be so fortunate, for when only half way down, the sitting-room door opened, and Mrs. Kroom, coming out quickly into the hall, intent on some errand of her own, saw Kate on the stairs where she had stopped involuntarily on hearing the door open.

She recovered herself immediately, however, and came down easily and naturally with a pleasant, "Good-morning, Mrs. Kroom," to which the latter replied with a sharp,

"How did you get upstairs?"

"The simplest way in the world," Kate returned, still pleasantly, but with a little flash in her eye. "I saw no one in the house and walked right up," and with another "Good-morning," she opened the front door and closed it quickly behind her, before Mrs. Kroom could say anything farther.

The latter hesitated a moment, as if undecided whether to go upstairs or not and then returned to the sitting-room, shutting the door with an emphasis that was easily understood by Murva in her room above.

She knew, too well, that her stepmother had no sympathy when she was the victim of her father's anger, however unreasonable it might be. Mrs. Kroom had

quite enough to do to bear his tyranny herself; and her jealousy of Murva led her to feel rather pleased than otherwise when the latter had to bear her share of it. It is human nature, both unredeemed and redeemed, to feel one's smart the less when looking upon another's.

CHAPTER II.

NICHOLAS KROOM was a man liked by none and tolerated by few. His will was law for all who belonged to him. He recognised no right of decision in one of his family, dictating all its affairs, from the bill-of-fare for dinner to the size of his daughter's gloves. Considering himself a man of much importance to the community, that he was not recognised as such by others made it all the worse for his own family. There, at least, he would be supreme.

Illness with his wife or daughter was a crime, with his neighbours, nonsense, with himself, an undeserved misfortune. Money was a good thing to have, and belonged to the only one who earned it—the master of the family. A request for even a small amount brought, as a consequence, a severe and searching examination as to the necessities of the case, and unsparing condemnation if the last dress or pair of boots had not worn as long as they should.

With his mind's-eye he saw but one object, himself. Everything and everybody else was secondary, and to be considered only in their relations to him. Therefore he was egotistical and dogmatic, with an ungoverned temper which was excited by the least opposition. A quarrel with everyone whom he knew—soon rather than late—made him a man absolutely without friends. He was left to revolve in his own orbit, casting darkness and shadow while imagining himself a central sun.

Murva was his only child. Her mother had died in giving her birth. Her "nonsensical" name, as her father considered it, had been bestowed upon her by that dying mother who, for the first and only time in two years of married life, had her own way. Only the death-pallor on her face was potent enough to secure it for her.

Murva Kroom was a "peculiar" girl to those who did not know her family, because she was reserved, quiet and silent even to sadness. A refined, sensitive, intensely loving nature, constantly refused an outlet and turned back upon itself, when coupled with a strong sense of right and natural aspiration toward that for its own sake, is apt to develop and build a character so different from the ordinary as to be distinct from the mass; peculiar, because standing alone.

Her father was proud of her, even while he exacted the same implicit obedience as a woman which he had received from the child, because he instinctively recognised her finer and nobler nature.

A few years after her mother's death, during, which many housekeepers had come and gone, he returned from a business trip with a new wife, a widow with the reputation of being a vixen, who was quite willing to marry again, even on a comparatively short acquaintance, as she considered herself equal to the task of managing any man alive.

He thought she did not seem like a woman who would get sick easily, and oblige him to hire servants and pay doctors' bills; and he knew too well his former success in breaking the wills of women with whom he had to deal, to have any doubt in the present instance.

So he brought her home, and many of his town-folk prophesied that he had found his match at last. But,

as time went on, there was abundant evidence to show that he had conquered her as he conquered all dependent on him; not without many a hard battle as the neighbours could testify, and they also declared that he did not hesitate to use physical force when "his temper was up."

She had a coarse nature and the disposition which accompanies such. She wanted to appear what she knew she was not; and the failure of her attempts made her, at times, recklessly reveal the coarseness which at others she strove to hide.

Mr. Kroom's surface manner being more like what she endeavoured to imitate than any she saw in her immediate surroundings, it attracted her from their first meeting; and there was, at the same time, the attraction which the more intelligent brute in him had for the less in her; the attraction which the stronger has for the weaker of the same kind.

Murva's natural refinement, which expressed itself in the tone of her voice, the aspect of her face, and in every movement of her body, was a continual offense to her; and the consequence was a mean jealousy which rejoiced in the girl's unhappiness, though it brought no gain to herself.

She had no children, had never been a mother, and was without a particle of mother-love. She conceived the idea that if it were not for Murva, she would have far less trouble with her husband; consequently, the anger and dissatisfaction which she did not dare vent on him, the daughter received the full benefit of. She used Murva as a safety-valve, and the more willingly that she hated her contrast to herself; and so, having one always on hand, she was able to bear her life better than she otherwise would have done.

Nicholas Kroom, in his heart of hearts, was ashamed of his wife's coarseness, but the latter was a good worker, did not cost him much money, and he was her master; a fact on which he prided himself, for it had been no easy victory.

To do him justice, he did not know all that Murva had to bear from her stepmother, for the latter took good care to use her safety-valve but seldom in his hearing, and the girl never complained to him. She bore her father's tyranny and her stepmother's injustice with the same pale face and restrained manner, which caused him some uneasiness in his better moods and an excess of anger in his furious ones.

To-day, Murva dropped heavily in her chair when she heard the door close behind Kate, dreading to hear her stepmother's foot upon the stairs; and a sigh of relief escaped her when all remained quiet below. She tried to go on with her mending, but soon the slender hands fell in her lap, and the look that often came in her face when she was alone stole over it.

The dread and fear of a moment before had vanished, and an unutterable loneliness and longing were in their place; an intense longing for something which the grey eyes sought in vain—a longing which possessed her so completely as to be a pictured prayer.

Though no word came from her lips, though no sound even of breathing could have been heard, so still was she, face and form were an embodied prayer, to be heard with the eyes. They spoke their own language, which would have needed no translation for a looker-on.

Within her clamoured for answer the question she had asked herself ever since she could remember, Why? Why? Why?

"Why cannot my life be like that of other girls?

Why must I be denied that which the poorest has bestowed upon her—the love and tenderness which belong to girlhood, and some measure of freedom? Why cannot my father be like other fathers? Why must I be singled out for an unnatural life; for it is unnatural, the way I live. It is not I who am seen from day to day watching every word I speak and everything I do so as not to give my father cause for more harshness and condemnation! It is a mask behind which I hide, longing for love and freedom!"

Love and freedom! These were always coupled together in Murva's musings. Each meant the other to her. She could remember no love shown her in her own home throughout her whole life. Authority was all she could look back upon. It filled all the years of her childhood and girlhood, and shut out that which rightfully belonged there.

She had always been fed and clothed, of course, but told that she must not eat this and must wear that. She had never been free to do as she chose; never been free even to have a feeling which her father would not bend in acknowledgment of his authority if he could.

But freedom must be for her sometime! It surely belonged to her as to all. Have it she must or die. She could not continue to live this life of repression. And she thought with increasing satisfaction that on her twenty-first birthday she could stand erect and own herself.

She could breathe then; now, she did not; she existed somehow, but not by breathing in that which was free to all, for there was nothing free to her. And with freedom would come love, for there was love for her, somewhere. With so much of it in the world, surely she could not always be left out.

The street gate clicked sharply; she knew her father was come home, and with a sudden feeling of dismay she saw how little she had done. The pile of mending was nearly as high as ever, and she had been very idle, she realised all at once.

"Been gone to the moon again, instead of tendin, to your work," she could hear her stepmother say; for Murva's habit of abstraction, of going into herself to the exclusion of her surroundings, when her father was out of the way, always called forth a sharp rebuke from that personage.

Poor woman! She could not let an occasion go by for passing on to Murva some of the despotism she experienced. Slave in one direction she was consequentl tyrant in another. It was natural. The world is full of it.

She heard her father's and stepmother's voices for a moment; then he entered the hall and came at once to her room.

"Has Kate Melton been here?" was his first question, without any salutation whatever. No man could be more courteous in manner to comparative strangers, according to what he considered courtesy; but that was unnecessary in his own family, and might lead to a familiarity which would weaken his authority.

"Yes, father," replied Murva, with a sinking at her heart.

"Didn't I tell you to remain alone in your room all day?" he demanded sternly.

"Yes, father; but, indeed, Kate was not to blame. She came directly to my room, not knowing there was any reason why I should not see her; and I could not send her away at once."

He hesitated a moment, and then, much to Murva's

relief, said only, "You can come down to dinner now. I'll talk to you some other time." Then left the room and went downstairs.

Murva, knowing well that no feeling for her had shortened her confinement, but that he had need of her in some way, slowly followed, wondering what the afternoon had in store for her: and was met by the question from her stepmother, "How much mendin' have you got done? A nice lot, I dare say, and you a-gabbin' with that Kate Melton all the forenoon!"

"Not much, mother, I am afraid," replied Murva gently. "I did not feel like work, and have been very idle."

"Didn't feel like work," repeated Mrs. Kroom with a sneer. "Well, I have to work whether I feel like it or not, and I don't know as you are any better than other people."

"Be quiet, will you?" said Mr. Kroom sharply. "Attend to your own affairs, and I will attend to Murva."

Mrs. Kroom subsided, with a look which boded ill for Murva when her father should be out of the way. The dinner passed in silence, as their dinners often did; only on rare occasions was Mr. Kroom in a frame of mind which admitted of an approach to unrestrained intercourse, and as Murva grew older it was more and more difficult for her to suit her mood to his. She could not be light-hearted and cheerful because he seemed to expect it of her by attempts at pleasantry which were heavy and cumbersome to the last degree.

That meal disposed of, Mr. Kroom drew from his pocket a package of papers and handed them to Murva with the—request I should like to say, but he rarely requested in his own family, he usually commanded—

to make up those accounts and have them ready for him by evening.

She knew, now, why she had been released from her confinement. There was trouble at the store again, and she had the more work to do in consequence.

Murva was often obliged to help him with his accounts, for he never could retain a bookkeeper for any length of time, and all his employees were changed too often to have any interests identical with his.

She needed few instructions; she had done the same work too many times, and he left her with the remark that he should expect to find them ready when he came home.

Murva had hardly settled to her task, when a rattling of dishes, loud and determined, told her what she had to expect; and in a moment her stepmother appeared in the open door with, "I should like to know, Murva Kroom, whether you are going to help do these dishes or not?"

"I cannot, mother," replied Murva, "for father must have these bills to-night without fail, and I shall have to work every moment to get them ready in time."

"Oh! of course, you can do everything but what I want you to: I can slave from morning till night to get you something ready to put in your stomach and you can sit fiddlin, with a pen for hours and hours, and call that work. I don't see how you can stay around home as you do for me to wait on; I should think you would have more pride than to be nosed round like a young one at your age. You think you know so much more than I do because you can talk about books and such trash! Why don't you do something with what you know?"

Murva made no answer, but bent closer over her writing, and Mrs. Kroom after waiting a moment went on:

"I know I had more spunk at your age than to be ordered here and ordered there as you are. The idea of a great grown woman bein' told she can't go to a party or a picnic if she wants to! You don't need to have any row with your father about it; just pack up your things and slip off unbeknown to 'im; that's the best way," and she looked sharply at Murva to see what effect her advice had on her.

She felt the sting in her stepmother's words, and, for a moment, her longing to be rid of this miserable life made her half resolve to take her advice; but she knew her father well enough to know that so long as he had any legal claim upon her he would not rest a moment until he found her out and enforced it. Let her go where she would, he would find her and bring her back again.

She knew it, and knew, too, that she did not want to steal away as if she had no right to herself. No: her place was there until she was her own mistress and then——

Turning to her stepmother, she said quietly, "When I am legally free to choose my own course, I shall leave my father's house and not before. We do not need to discuss the subject further," and resumed her writing.

When Murva spoke in that tone, Mrs. Kroom knew she would not reply to her if she talked for an hour longer; so with a "I hope you'll find yourself as free then as you think you will!" for a parting shot, she slammed the door and betook herself to her dishes.

Murva wrote steadily for a moment with those last words ringing in her ears, when, suddenly, the thought

came to her, was there any possibility of her not being free when she became of age? What could hinder her from carrying out her intention? Nothing whatever; and she resumed her work, repeating reassuringly to herself, "Nothing! Nothing!"

CHAPTER III.

DONALD CRAWFORD as the youngest son of a New England farmer, had been born and bred in a Maine farmhouse. In his boyhood he had determined that he would one day be a physician, and a good one, too. So he had worked and studied, saved and contrived, as only that person will do who has but one thought, night or day, and that, a determination to succeed.

And now at twenty-eight, he had been settled two years in the manufacturing town of Milleville, where Kate's home was. The Reverend Howard Melton had been one of his first patients. He had been greatly pleased with Dr. Crawford, had recommended him to others, and his recommendation had considerably advanced the young physician's prospects.

Now the time had come when Donald felt justified in taking to himself a wife. Ever since he first met Kate he had had the determination to win her if he could.

She was so charming, so saucy, so beautiful, and so tantalising! And that she was a good daughter he had opportunities of knowing, although he could not help seeing, at the same time, that she was somewhat self-willed; and once, when he had heard her say in conversation with her father, that he seemed to have a very good opinion of himself, he made up his mind that she should one day have the same of him.

So while he worked steadily and faithfully in his pro-

fession, a deep love for the beautiful girl grew up in his heart; and Kate, on her side, could not but admire the strong, upright character of the young man, and the earnestness with which he devoted himself to his life-work.

His sympathy with the poor and unfortunate, his readiness to help them on all occasions, touched a sympathetic chord in her heart; and when, one day, with the quiet, earnest manner habitual to him, he told her how dearly he loved her, and asked her to be his wife, Kate knew that she, too, loved him, and that no greater happiness was possible for her, than to belong to him.

Dr. Crawford felt that the world was very good to him as he walked along on his way to visit a patient and thought of the contrast between them. He was just starting in life with every prospect of a happy and successful future. John Wilson was going down the other side of the hill, and the path was rough and stony to the tired feet.

He thought of the old man's life of self-denial, that his orphan niece might be cared for; and as he remembered the patience and fortitude with which he had met every reverse, even to the loss of his little fortune which, for his niece's sake, he had invested in the hope of larger returns, and then the loss of his health and strength, so that now he was helpless in every way, Donald wondered within himself if he would be able to exercise the same self-denial, maintain the same cheerful fortitude that characterised this old man in his lonely old age. For the watchful eye of the physician could not fail to see that John Wilson's niece did not appreciate her uncle's devotion to her, and that a heavy sorrow lay close to the invalid's heart.

He found him sitting in his old-fashioned rocking-chair at the window from which he could see his niece on her way home from work. He always sat there. His eyes followed her out of sight when she went away and found her again at the same point when she returned; and never yet had Haddie entered the house and found him without a smile to greet her. No matter how ill he was, he always had the same look for her.

"Good-afternoon, Mr. Wilson," said Donald, stepping to his side and taking his hand.

"Good-afternoon, my dear young doctor," answered John, trying to grasp the other's hand, but in vain, for his joints were so swollen and stiffened as to make it impossible. "You see I am in the grasp of the enemy again. I know you will give him hard battle on my account, but it's getting where it ain't much use, eh, doctor?"

Donald knew that was the truth, but he could not bear to tell the old man so.

"We will see what we can do," he replied; "you must have the same courage and determination you have always had; you know that is half the battle."

"Yes," said old John with a sigh: "that's the least I can do when your kindness never gives out. You've been a good friend to me, young man, without any reward for it that I can give you."

"Never mind that, Mr. Wilson," said Donald quickly. "Every physician whose heart is in his work gets his reward as he goes along."

While he consulted with his patient, Haddie came slowly down the street from the mill where she worked, with the dragging footstep and sullen look that were becoming habitual to her. She was constantly pitying herself, and her demand upon the supply consumed

it. She had no room in her thoughts for any one else, or any residue of consideration to give them.

Old John saw her coming and, turning to Donald, said, with a tone he never forgot, "Oh! Doctor! My heart aches for my dear girl. Why must I be helpless and dependent upon her, when I should be the one to work?" And he pressed his poor maimed hands together and looked at Donald imploringly.

"If you could work you would, Mr. Wilson," replied Donald, laying his hand gently on his; "you have always done your duty and have nothing to reproach yourself with. You worked for your niece many years, and now it is her turn to work for you. She is strong and healthy and, of course, glad and willing to show you the loving care you have always given her. There is no injustice in her working for you, Mr. Wilson."

The old man sighed wearily, but Haddie was at the door, and at once his face assumed the smiling, cheerful look that always greeted her.

"Well, dear! You are home earlier than usual, ain't you? Is anything the matter?" he added quickly, as she dropped heavily in a chair when she saw the doctor.

"I was tired, and so I asked out," she replied, with a tone which seemed to say, "I'm not going to work when I'm tired." "You're worse again, aren't you?" without any expression of regret or sympathy.

"I'm afraid I'm getting pretty bad, dear," answered her uncle, leaning his head back and closing his eyes.

Donald watched her quietly for a moment, and then, taking out his watch, said, "I must go now, Mr. Wilson, but I will see you again to-morrow;" and turning to Haddie, "If you will come with me to my office, Miss Wilson, I will give you the medicine for your uncle and directions for his treatment as we walk along."

She rose, and going to the small mirror hanging on the wall settled her hat and arranged her hair; then, saying to her uncle only, "I'll be back pretty soon," left the room with Dr. Crawford.

The old man's eyes followed them for a moment as they walked away, while the cheerful look died out of his face and soon great tears rolled slowly down his cheeks. She never saw them there. To her he gave all he had to give; his sorrows he kept to himself.

Dr. Crawford walked silently by Haddie's side for a moment, thinking that what he had to tell her must give her pain, and dreading to do so. He divined something of the girl's inward rebellion against her lot, never dreaming, however, of the extent to which she had hardened herself.

With his knowledge of her uncle's devotion to her, he expected, naturally, her first thought would be one of sympathy and pity for him in his affliction.

Haddie was as silent in her turn, for she felt her unjust burden weigh the heavier from finding the doctor with her uncle. He must be very badly off again, and now she would have to stay with him and wait upon him when at home, besides doing the work which should maintain them both.

"I must tell you, Miss Wilson," Donald finally began, "that I have no hope of your uncle's recovery. The disease has so firm a hold upon him that, at his age, all that can be done is to relieve his sufferings as much as possible."

"Is he likely to live long?" asked Haddie abruptly; and something in her tone more than in her words caused him to look at her closely while he replied:

"That I cannot tell; he may live for some time yet, for he had, originally, a good constitution; or he

may die suddenly if the disease attacks the heart."

She half looked up as if compelled by his steady gaze upon her; then dropped her face again with an added compression of her lips, as if she would let something escape through them if she were not doubly careful.

"All that I can do for him while he lives I will do," continued Donald; "and I want to say to you now, while I have the opportunity, that I do not wish any thought of indebtedness on your part to me to add to the burden you are already carrying. My services are freely at your uncle's disposal."

Haddie made no reply, but continued to walk silently by his side till they had reached his office, where Dr. Crawford prepared the medicines he wished administered and gave them into her keeping with directions for their use. She seemed to be so absorbed in her own thoughts that he repeated a part of what he had said, telling her that he would visit her uncle again in the morning.

She turned to go out of the door which she had already opened before she seemed to remember that something was due from her. Then, turning with an "I am much obliged to you," which had no heart in it, she went down the steps and walked slowly up the street. There was none of the spring in her tread which would show a haste in reaching her destination; none of that desire to press forward which one who had left another who was dear and to whom he wished to return in the shortest possible time, would manifest.

Dr. Crawford looked after her for a moment, thinking to himself, "Poor old John! If you receive no love and watchful ministration from your niece, you must suffer a sharper pang than the rheumatism has power to cause you."

CHAPTER IV.

"ARE you not well, Harriet?" asked her uncle anxiously, as he watched her prepare to clear away the tea-things, after having given him his supper without eating scarcely any herself.

"I'm well enough!" she answered shortly, going on with her work. He followed her with his eyes and with such a loving, wistful look in them, while his hands moved somewhat restlessly about as if trying to do something they could not accomplish.

"I wish that I could help you, dear," and he looked at them regretfully; "but these old hands ain't good for much now." His head, which he had raised from the chair fell back again wearily.

"I don't need any help," was her response, without any notice of his anxiety. After two or three ineffectual attempts to draw her into conversation—attempts which were nearly brought to a sudden end by the pain he endured, but which he used all his remaining strength to suppress, that she might not know of it, he left her to herself.

Haddie finished her work in silence. Though rarely free in conversation with her uncle because of her inward rebellion against their poverty and against him as the chief cause of it, to-night an unusual taciturnity prevailed with her. She seemed to be in a hurry to get through, going from one thing to another as if she had no time to spare; and before the hour at which

her uncle usually retired she came to assist him to his room.

"Bed-time already, Harriet?" said he. "Well! Well! I'll go at once, so that you can go too, for you are very tired to-night, my child. It is hard enough that you have to work outside as you do without having it all at home beside. But your old uncle appreciates all you do for him, and loves you better than he can tell." And his voice broke, while with her help and a stout old stick he struggled to his feet, and very slowly and painfully made his way to a bedroom which opened from the living room where they were.

Haddie helped him to bed, and started to leave the room.

"O, Harriet, won't you kiss me?" called her uncle. As a child she had always kissed him "good-night!" and "good-morning!" and when she was older her frequent requests for some adornment her heart was set on, were usually so accompanied. But since he had lost the little he had, which enabled him to grant, at least some of them, she had not been so ready with demonstrations of affection.

She hesitated a moment, then came to the bed, and stooped over him, touching his cheek with her lips. They were wet when she raised her head; she had felt the tears rolling down his face, and the hardness in her own relaxed somewhat as she went out and up the stairs to the half-story chamber which was her own room.

Then she threw herself into a chair, folded her arms tightly, and seemed to be preparing herself for something; and she was preparing for the decision of a question she had asked herself, little by little, without replying to it, till to-day it stood out, sharp and clear, on her mental horizon, and would be answered.

Should she stay at home and continue to live this dog's life, work, work, work all the time, and then only money enough to buy bare necessaries—none of the lovely things all young women had, in some degree. She had no time for the pleasures they enjoyed as well. Time taken for these was so much out of her wages at the end of the week; and her uncle was sick so much, and so helpless when he was sick, that she had to stay with him when she was not at the factory.

She was tired of it all; it wasn't right that she should be deprived of everything she wanted. If her uncle should die she would be free to go somewhere else and see what she could do. She could find work more agreeable to her, if she must work, than the factory in Millville, and she would at least have what she earned for herself.

But her uncle might live a long time yet; the doctor said so; and she would have to keep up this drudgery day by day as long as he did live if she stayed at home; while outside of all this, outside of the town were those large cities where so much was going on; where such beautiful things were to be had; where there were theatres and concert halls, pleasures of all kinds all the time; where it must be delightful simply to walk the streets and see so much. Work there, must be a very different thing from what it was here.

"But your uncle!" something said within her persistently. Her uncle? He needed her. Well! Hadn't she taken care of him for the last three years? Here she was nearly nineteen years old, and what had she had of her life? He had no legal claim on her; she was free to go away from him if she chose to. He had taken care of her as long as he could? Well! Why shouldn't he? He might have taken better care

of his money than he did and not made himself a pauper. The little old house they lived in amounted to nothing. She did not see why she should go on in this treadmill forever because he had been foolish. He would not even call her "Haddie" because she had been named "Harriet" for her mother.

She rose from the chair and began to walk restlessly back and forth across the room. Some action of conscience, faint with her where it would have been vigorous with a less selfish nature, impelled her to movement. Under all her arguments, back of all her self-pity and commiseration, was the knowledge that all she was capable of was due to her uncle in his poverty and helplessness; but she had repressed this conviction and encouraged her feelings so long that it offered but feeble resistance now.

She went to the window and looked out. The wind was rising and beginning to speak with its many voices. "Go! Go!" said the louder as it swept by. "Stay! Stay!" said the gentler as it rustled about and seemed to cling and hold to the window.

Resistance to her desire grew feeble. She began to picture to herself, as she had often done before, the delights which lay beyond the confines of Millville and her uncle's home; beyond the duties which claimed her there. Duties? Well! they were one-sided ones. Were there no duties to her? Was it not her right to have and enjoy what belonged to her as much as to others? Why should she not get it for herself if she could?

She began to walk back and forth again. She wished she could keep on walking till all her present life was far behind her; till she found some of that which, with all her heart and soul, she craved. There

were girls in the factory who told her that she was a fool to work as she did with her pretty face and figure; that she could get along much easier in some of the large cities. She knew that she was the prettiest girl among them. If she could only have what she wanted to set off her beauty, she could outshine any girl in Millville.

She turned to the row of pegs in the corner where her clothes hung, and thought to herself that they would not be much to carry if she should decide to go away. A stronger gust swept by the house.

She walked to the pegs with a determined though light step—it had all at once grown lighter and more purposeful as if she had suddenly reached a conclusion. She brought the things hanging there to the table where she had placed her lamp and made them into a compact bundle. She gathered together the few trinkets she possessed, and when all was done examined the pile critically. It was an amount that would be small or large by comparison. To remain in the room as a young woman's wardrobe, it was not much. To be carried in one's arms as a bundle it was considerable. But that was just what she was going to do. Yes! She had made up her mind. She would live this life no longer.

The wind kept blowing. Now it was all, Come!—C–o–m–e—!——C—o—m—e—e—e!

She drew her purse from her pocket and opened it. It took but a moment to count its contents, she divided the money, making two portions of it and looked at them. O, how little it was altogether! And how next to nothing, the half of it? She withdrew a part of one portion and placed it with the other, putting the greater into her purse again and laying the rest upon the bureau.

Her lamp began to burn low; the oil was nearly exhausted, but she had well-nigh finished. In a few moments she threw herself on the bed and as she did so the lamp went out.

She would lie and rest but she must not sleep, for she meant to go when she could see the first signs of approaching day. She did not want to walk too long in the dark, and yet she meant to be outside Millville before she was likely to meet anyone who would notice her.

Why did the wind sound so strangely. She had slept in this room ever since she came to her uncle; and she had never heard it as it was to-night.

It said all sorts of things: it shrieked out that she was wicked to go away and leave her uncle; and then suddenly began to moan, as if impelled by pain. She put her hands over her ears to shut out the sound, and then it told her something else.

It told her of what she had only imagined, never seen—bright rooms, gorgeously furnished; handsome men and beautiful women; elegant dresses and plenty of sparkling diamonds; the admiring attention of adorers.

Her cheeks burned and her heart throbbed. She removed her hands and sat up with the impulse which impelled her. No, it was not near enough to morning yet, and she must wait a little longer.

The wind was more quiet now; it did not shriek any more, but it would keep on moaning. It was a patient, enduring kind of a moan, as if it knew that any outcry was useless.

She lay down again with the pillow about her head, and before her mental vision rose, in sharp contrast to the first delightful views, the picture of her uncle in his

desolation when she should have gone. What would he do then, and he so helpless?

She turned over and moved about restlessly. She could not find a comfortable position, try as she would. What was the matter with the bed?

Her uncle would be taken care of by the people among whom he had lived so long if she were not there to relieve them of the responsibility. Why shouldn't they? And why should she not have the chance of bettering herself? She could not be young always, and to expect her to waste her time in that wearying round was too much. What opportunities would ever come to her, so? If only she was sure that he would die soon!

There was a blow upon the window which brought her to her feet. It was only the wind hammering for a moment and suddenly dying down. Yes! There were the first signs of coming daylight, and now was her time to go.

She felt for her hat and shawl, put them on, then picked up her bundle and started for the door, but turned as she reached it and came back.

Taking a piece of paper from one of the drawers she went to the window and wrote a few words as well as she could in the lesser darkness there. Laying the paper upon the bureau, she turned toward the door again, and, as she did so, her hand touched the money she had left there before.

She hesitated, then went on to the door, hesitated again—the wind was still—came back and seized it. She held it for an instant in her hand, then dropped it in her pocket as she stood at the top of the stairs.

The wind moaned again; moaned all the while as she went softly down and reached the door. But it

was quiet as she made ready to open it—so quiet. She wished that it would roar, that there might be some noise outside in which she could open the door.

She could hear her own heart beat in the stillness and her hand trembled. Was that the wind moaning again or was it her uncle? He did often moan in the sleep, troubled by pain, which came to him.

She sat down a moment on the bottom stair. For an instant she had the impulse to go back; but then all was quiet again, and she laid her hand once more on the door. This time she opened it, and very gently. It made no noise: there was none within or without.

She closed it behind her and waited for a moment upon the step, but all was still. She reached the walk, and turned down the street.

All at once the wind sprang up and blew against her; blew at her back so that she could not resist it, but was blown along whether she would or no. She tried to turn around, but it took her breath from her, and she went on again. On! on! down the street—On! on! into the distance—On! on! till she was out of sight.

CHAPTER V.

DR. CRAWFORD knocked at John Wilson's door the next morning without hearing the usual cheery "Come in!" He knocked again, waiting a moment, then opened it and stepped in. He had noticed that the old man was not in his usual chair at the window; and, as he looked around the vacant room, he felt a new forlornness. The bedroom door was open, and a feeble voice called, "Is that you, Harriet?"

"It is I, Mr. Wilson," he answered, and moved quickly forward.

"Oh, Doctor, where is my girl?" cried the old man, as Donald stepped to the bedside.

The professional eye saw that he had changed much for the worse since the day before. He was shrunken and pale; and a look was in his eye which was pitiful to behold. It was as if he longed and looked for something he could not find, that he feared he never would find. There was a mingled hope and fear, but the fear was largely in excess; and it seemed as if he had gathered himself together to meet something or other,—what, he did not yet know.

"Where is your niece, Mr. Wilson?" repeated Donald with surprise. "I have not seen her. Did she not go to the factory this morning as usual?"

"I have not seen or heard her this morning, Doctor. O! what is it? What is it? I have called her many

times, and she does not answer. But perhaps she cannot hear me, for I feel strangely weak this morning, and is lying ill upstairs. Do go up at once, and see!" And the poor old man tried to rise from the bed, as if he would go also.

"Lie still, Mr. Wilson," answered Donald. "I will go at once and give her such attention as she needs."

He went to the stairs and called, not loudly but in a clear, penetrating tone, "Miss Wilson! Are you ill, and shall I come upstairs?"

There was no answer—not a sound. He went quickly up and saw that the door of the chamber was open. Without hesitation he stepped inside. There was no one there. The bed had not been occupied as usual, for the covers were not disarranged, though it had evidently been lain upon. It looked like a room that had been used, but that now waited another occupant.

There was a small piece of paper lying on the bureau. He stepped quickly towards it and picked it up.

"You need not look for me, for I have gone away and am not coming back. I am tired of nothing but work."

That was all. He turned the paper over; nothing there. He looked around the room. A dress lay over a chair; he had seen her wear it when she came from the mill. One of the drawers of the bureau was slightly open. He opened it further and looked in; opened the others, and they were all empty, except for a soiled ribbon or two and other worthless scraps. The pegs in the wall were empty also. Haddie Wilson had evidently left her home, forsaking her uncle in his helplessness; and his heart almost stood still as this conviction was forced upon him.

"Poor old John! How can I tell him this?" he groaned within himself. "What will he do?"

"Doctor! Doctor!" came in feeble tones from below.

Donald knew that it was useless to wait. He must go down and tell the shameful truth to the old man. It would break his heart. It might bring the end which the rheumatism was sure to do later.

But it could not be helped. If the girl was so supremely selfish as to desert her uncle in this way, there was no probability that she would relent and return. There could be nothing gained by keeping the truth from him for a few days. Sooner or later he must know it.

He went slowly down the stairs, and, used as he was to the sight of suffering, mental as well as physical, even in his few years of experience, his feet were heavy; the weight upon them grew as he approached John Wilson's room.

The old man's eyes caught him at its threshold and, at the same moment, the paper in his hand.

He shrank and shrivelled visibly as Dr. Crawford came toward him. His mouth was open as if to speak, but no word came from him. His eyes were fastened upon the doctor, and were the only part of him that was still. His whole body was quivering.

"Mr. Wilson, your niece is not in her room, and I have found this explanation of her absence. Try to hear and bear it as well as you can; all your friends, and you have many of them, will help you." And he read the few words aloud.

Not a sound came from John Wilson. His eyes and mouth closed and the quivering suddenly ceased. Dr. Crawford leaned over him and felt his pulse. It was barely perceptible.

He held his wrist for a moment, and then leaning over him said in a positive, even a commanding tone,

"Mr. Wilson! Listen to me!"

The old man made no motion. It was if he had suddenly been struck a fearful blow which had stretched him out, strengthless and senseless, depriving him even of the power to breathe; but the pulse grew a little stronger.

Donald called again in the same tone, "Mr. Wilson! Listen to me!"

This time there was a slight quivering of the eyelids, and he continued, "Your niece was very tired. I noticed her look yesterday. She has done this when she was incapable of realising what she was about or the consequences of her action. When she looks at it a little later she will see differently than she does now. We must not judge her hastily, but wait for her to come to herself."

He judged rightly that if he did not blame the girl but seemed to have sympathy for her, it would give, to a nature like John Wilson's, more present help than any sympathy expressed for him.

"Yes, Doctor—you're right! She was too tired—to think—what she did! My—poor—girl!" And the tears began to run down his drawn and furrowed face. "If only—something—does not happen—to her!" And the unselfish love he had ever borne his niece spoke in his feeble and slowly-uttered words.

The first shock and sense of helplessness was already invaded by that which had ever been the strong and leading motive of his life since she came to him, a little child, with no one but him to care for her.

"My dear, dear—child! What can we—do for her—Doctor?"

"We cannot immediately do anything, Mr. Wilson. We must wait till we hear from her. She would not remain in Millville or in its vicinity, and we do not know where to look. You will hear from her soon, and we must attend to what is to be done here. You have had no breakfast this morning, and you are our first care."

The old man made no reply, but lay quite still; and Donald, tearing the blank page from a letter which he had in his pocket, wrote rapidly for a few moments, then going to the street door looked about for a possible messenger.

Not far off an urchin was demonstrating the fact that boyhood's arms and legs are, to a degree, interchangeable, and that the upright attitude, which is considered normal, is not absolutely essential to locomotion.

He relapsed into that position, however, when he heard Dr. Crawford's call, the better to see where it came from, and put his legs to their legitimate use as he came running to answer.

"Here, take this note to that address—you know where it is, don't you—the Rev. Howard Melton, and——"

"Yep! I know 'um! That's the parson, ain't it?" interrupted the youngster.

"Yes. Go with it as quickly as you can, and bring me an answer."

"Say, 'll you be here when I git back?" and the boy clutched the note tight and looked up with the intent, plainly written on his face, to make the best bargain he could in the present instead of trusting to a possible better in the future.

"Of course I will," answered Donald. "Here," holding out a coin which the grimy paw swallowed so quickly the sun had no chance to shine upon it. "When

you bring me the answer I will give you another."

"I'm yer man," answered the urchin, and started off, right end up, at a pace which was sure to put him in possession of the second coin in a short time if continued.

Going quietly but quickly to work Donald soon had a fire in the stove, water warmed, and ready to give the old man the careful attention his condition required. While he worked he continued to talk to him in the same assured, confident tone, taking care to give him none of that commiseration which would have destroyed the little self-control old John was able to command.

He had hardly finished when Kate and her mother knocked at the door, which he quickly opened.

"Oh, Donald!" came from both simultaneously; but he held up a warning finger and glanced toward the bedroom, while he said brightly, "How prompt you are! Now I am sure Mr. Wilson will have a good breakfast very shortly!" and showed them by his manner that nothing was to be said in the old man's hearing.

They understood, and went quickly to work, unpacking the basket they had brought with them, Donald continuing his ministrations meanwhile, not without having taken a kiss from the lips which seemed quite willing to meet his, and of which Mrs. Melton was discreetly unobservant.

When all was ready Donald called Mrs. Melton aside and said,

"Now I am going to find some one to stay here with him constantly. I know that you and Kate will remain till I have succeeded. Do not talk of his niece's departure any more than you can help without seeming unfriendly; and give him this powder after he has eaten. It will make him sleep, and sleep is the best medicine for him just now.

CHAPTER VI.

TIME passed slowly for old John Wilson, as spring grew into summer. The woman whom Dr. Crawford had provided as nurse was conscientious in her care of him, and all that the knowledge and skill of the physician could command was done. But the hands and limbs grew more misshapen and useless, and the invalid more and more helpless in consequence.

He never complained. No matter how severely he suffered, even when he could not speak for pain, and all his strength was necessary for endurance, no complaint or rebellion against his lot ever came to speech when he was able to converse again. And no one had ever heard the smallest word of reproach for his niece. He spoke of her less as time went on, but whenever he did, it was with the same unselfish love he had always shown.

Kate and her mother continued faithful in their attentions. Murva, too, visited him frequently, giving him much of the time she had hitherto used for companionship with Kate. Her father raised no objection when she told him of Mr. Wilson's forlorn condition, and asked permission to help in the care of him.

"See that you are at home when I want you," he had said with the brevity characteristic of him when issuing orders. Whys and wherefores were unnecessary for those who owed him obedience.

Murva felt that she was the greater gainer of the two in her visits to him. There seemed to be some subtle bond between them, one so intangible as to be unperceived by others and only silently felt by themselves; but which made their intercourse helpful to both.

Murva had, unconsciously, a deeply religious nature; yet not such as accords with the commonly understood interpretation of that term. She could not accept unquestioningly all that was spoken from the pulpit because it was spoken there, or the views of those who had been church-members more years than she was old, and who, in consequence, were so familiar with God and his ways they could speak with authority.

While she gave them the respectful attention due their sincerity, and did not contradict their assertions, within herself she pondered over them, and found herself often unable to yield assent; the statements she heard contradicted each other.

When Mr. Melton read from the Bible one Sunday that "God was too pure to behold iniquity;" and the next, that He was "angry with the wicked every day," she found herself unable to understand how this could be.

When the good brethren and sisters of the church came after the service to labour with her and exhort her to give her heart to Christ, she felt a weariness and an emptiness which it was difficult to conceal, and which half frightened her also; for surely they must know much better than she, and there must be something wrong with her for her to feel so.

She had put these questions from her as something she could not understand, and yet with a half-conscious intention of getting to the bottom of them sometime or other. Religion was right and proper, of course,

but somehow she did not feel the need of it at present; and she shrank into herself more and more whenever she was exhorted to "Come forward and confess Christ."

Her father was true to his nature in his religion as in everything else. He had never joined the church, because he had never been able to get through the six months' probation required by its discipline, without experiences with some of the brethren which scattered brotherly love to the four winds of heaven.

Where he could not rule he could not adjust himself; and so he kept outside the fold, contenting himself with regular attendance at church and his own views of Mr. Melton's sermons which, to his mind, he could have made a great deal better.

He paid for his pew, or rather for his half pew, which his family more than occupied, for these were intended for five persons; but in times of great spiritual refreshment they would hold six. So he made this number the basis for the settlement of the sum he should pay into the church treasury.

He permitted the contribution box to pass by him with a lofty fortitude which was felt almost as a rebuke by the meek little deacon who passed it; while his wife and daughter, not being sustained by the consciousness of uprightness which animated the head of the family, could only take refuge in the fact, as the box passed on its fruitless mission up the pew, that having no money of their own they were powerless to give any, even to the church.

There were times when he would attempt to have more religion in the family than usual; and these were when he had had some slight illness. He was afraid of sickness and death. These were his masters. He

could not rule over them and was at their mercy. Any little indisposition made him, through fear, a greater tyrant than ever. Did it happen in the night, both wife and daughter must get up and attend to him. If he could not sleep, they ought not to sleep.

After one of these experiences he would have family prayers night and morning, or what passed for such. There was little family unity in them, for Murva had no respect for this kind of religion, and could not prevent a feeling of contempt for the form of observance so inspired. And Mrs. Kroom would be inwardly in rebellion at being obliged to pass so much time on her knees when there was so much to do.

At first his prayers would be of an imploring nature, changing in a few days to an argumentative tendency. When they reached this stage they took place but once a day, instead of twice. Gradually they verged on the dictatorial; and when he had satisfactorily informed God of what He ought to do, they ceased altogether.

Mrs. Kroom declared to Murva, in one of her rare moments when she seemed to regard her without offence, that she thought her father was "more comfortable to get on with" before he had prayed than afterwards; while Murva herself, for a time after one of her father's religious spasms, was more inclined to turn away from all she saw and heard, hoping that sometime, somehow, she might see and understand what now was dark to her.

But since her visits to old John Wilson a new feeling had grown within her. It was something of which she had no inclination to speak, something which she could not express in words, something which seemed only a sense belonging to her, but which had hitherto been dormant and was only now rousing to activity.

They had talked about life and death—for he knew that he was nearing the border-line between the two—the here and the hereafter, God and Heaven.

Neither could have told how they first came to do so, or which had opened the way. Murva's intensely sympathetic nature made her, though comparatively undemonstrative, quick to feel another's moods and state of mind; and she had a kinship with all strong, earnest natures which acted as a channel between her and them and let her into their consciousness at times as if she had walked through an open door.

Though she had visited old John at first from a sense of duty, she almost immediately lost sight of that in the quiet pleasure she experienced; and she felt that he was helping her, as no one ever had, to see more clearly much that had been very dark to her. She seemed to feel as he felt and to be lifted by it out of a bog to where there seemed firm ground under her feet.

John Wilson was not, and never had been, a church member; consequently was not recognised as a Christian by those who were. Yet everyone who knew him, knew that he fulfilled the requirement "Love thy neighbour as thyself" for he proved this by his life, though no profession ever passed his lips.

He avoided any part in the discussion of religion when it occurred in his presence. He never took sides with one sect against another, never expressed any opinion as to the relative merits of creeds, and seemed as ready and willing to oblige a Universalist who did not believe in everlasting punishment as one of the good Methodist brethren who frequently inquired as to the state of his soul and obligingly pictured for him its future destination and condition if he did not come into the fold while there was yet time.

He went his way quietly among them, respected and liked by all. He sometimes attended Mr. Melton's church, and after he was confined to the house Mr. Melton visited him frequently, especially after his niece's disappearance, doing all in his power to comfort him and—as he felt it his duty—to lead his thoughts toward a preparation for death, without directly speaking of such a prospect.

He had no need to ask him if he felt resigned to go. Unprotesting submission to the inevitable had always been characteristic of old John Wilson. Neither could he detect any fear of the unknown hereafter, though he had often sought to discover if any existed with him.

"John," he had said, "do you feel that God has forgiven your sins and that your peace is made with him?"

"God is my Father, you say, and loves me as His son. That's it, isn't it, Mr. Melton?"

"Yes, John."

"Well, if I had a son and he went ever so far away from me and did ever so much that he oughtn't, he would be my son just the same, wouldn't he?"

"Yes, of course; but you would not feel towards him quite as you would if he had remembered and obeyed all that you had told him for his own good."

"You're right, Mr. Melton, I shouldn't; I should love him more because he would need it more."

"But, John, you are judging your heavenly Father by a very faulty earthly one."

"What else have we got to judge Him by, Mr. Melton?"

"Judge Him by His own words. They are written in the Holy Scriptures for our guidance."

"Yes, sir, I know. But there are so many of them in

the Bible that are very puzzlin'; and when you don't understand the directions you can't see exactly how to go. While I don't deny but what it is the Book, I feel to think of God just natural like, not as if He was away up above me and lookin' down on me, cold and severe. I can't get hold of Him that way. But I can see just how I'd feel for my son if he was in trouble. No matter what he'd done to me, I'd stand by him when he needed me, just the same; and, if he was in hard straits, that would be so much more reason for me to do everything for him I could."

"But, John, don't you see that if God's law has been broken it must be atoned for?"

"Yes, sir; but if I didn't mean any such thing,—if anybody didn't mean any such thing, seems as if that ought to be taken into account."

"The heart of man is prone to evil, John. We do it naturally. Not till a new heart is given us do we turn from our sinful ways. We must be washed in the blood of Jesus, or we cannot be clean."

"Well, Mr. Melton, I don't want to contradict you; 'twouldn't be becomin' in me, for you know a great deal more about it than I do. But somehow it don't seem quite fair that we should be punished for doin' what we didn't know any better than to do. I can see how when we make a mistake we've just got to take the consequences and get out of them for ourselves. They learn us a good deal sometimes, and specially to keep out o' that thing and not do it again. I can't see why God should punish us when we've already got the punishment through the doin' of it."

"Our first parents entailed sin upon us, John; we share in their fall, and that is why we must make atonement to be saved."

"Yes, I know the Bible tells us about the sin of Adam and Eve; but somehow I can't feel that I am a sinner because they were. I don't mean, Mr. Melton, that I ain't one: I know—none better—how much I've missed doin' that I ought to have done, and the more that I have done. But I mean that I'm no better and no worse for anything that Adam and Eve did in that garden; and I have a kind of a feelin' that I don't want to cover myself with them, for good or bad. Leastways, this is how it seems to me, that God isn't quite just, the other way."

"But God's ways are not our ways, John! How can we judge Him? They are past finding out by our weak minds. We must be guided by His Holy Word, and it teaches us plainly that without repentance and atonement there is no remission of sins. And this for every one of us, for God is no respecter of persons. Try to see this aright, John, that you may make your peace with God."

"Yes, Mr. Melton! I'll try hard to see more. But I can't rightly say as there is anything between us now to hinder it. If God is as willin' for peace as I am, He'll meet me half-way."

Mr. Melton had many conversations like this with John Wilson during the weeks of his helplessness. He felt it his duty to labour with him and bring him to a realisation of his needs: for he was an honest Methodist, and believed what he preached. Yet he could not but feel, sometimes, that John's position on some points was a strong one: that the conflict was between logic and creeds. But he prayed the more earnestly for guidance, that he might be faithful to his charge as a minister of God and save souls from the pit.

John Wilson felt that he could open his heart more to

Murva; for he recognised the questioning, seeking spirit in her and also the strong, though repressed, individuality which prevented her from being led by others: which impelled her to go searching for herself.

He knew, too, something of her home life, of what it must be with a man like Nicholas Kroom as the head of the household; and he felt tender sympathy for her repressed nature which was denied a normal and healthy outlet in her natural surroundings. Her kindness to his niece during their school-days, and afterward as she had opportunity, endeared her to him also: and of all his kind visitors and friends, hers was the face he loved best to see.

Murva was the only one to whom he spoke of Haddie with even a degree of freedom. And he had come to do so little by little; he could not himself have told how. He used to sit in his old chair by the window when he was able to be out of bed; the same window where he used to watch for her as she came home from work, and gaze steadily out up the street where she used to disappear and reappear as she went to and fro.

There would be a look of expectation in his eyes: the same look day after day as he was placed there; and when he had gazed in vain and was put to bed again, the disappointment and grief, silently and patiently endured, spoke from his face as no words could have uttered them.

"It do be just breakin' my heart, Miss Murva," declared his nurse, "to see that old man a wearin' away for grief of his niece! That it do! 'Tisn't the rheumatiz as is a killin' 'im or that's a going to his heart! It's the sorrer that's there already, and that's eatin' it away all the time!"

"Yes, Mrs. Wood, I feel that his sorrow has as much to do with his failing strength as his sickness. If only he could hear from her! If she would only write to him, it would do him so much good."

"La, Miss Murva! She ain't that kind. If she had a' b'en she couldn't 'ave gone away as she did. Do you see how he looks at every one that comes here? When they first come in, I mean! He's just askin' with his eyes, 'Have you heard anything of my niece?' and when he don't hear nothin' he jest shets everything up in himself and only shows folks how grateful he is to 'em for rememberin' 'im."

One afternoon after old John had told her what Mr. Melton had been saying to him, Murva suddenly broke out with, "How can God take vengeance upon the wicked, Mr. Wilson, if, as the Bible says, God is Love?"

"I don't quite see that myself, Miss Murva! Somehow I can't get hold of God that way; but it seems to me that I can *feel* God."

"Feel God, Uncle John! What do you mean by that?"

"Well, you know the Book says somethin' about feelin' after God if haply we might find Him; and it seems to me that this feelin' after Him is just what we need. I've heard all Mr. Melton's said, and I've heard a good many others talk too; but out of it all, this is just the way it seems to me. I've got to feel God for myself to know anything truly about Him."

Murva was struck by this thought of the old man's, and pondered it a moment silently.

"But how do we—how do you feel God, Uncle John?"

"Well, we've got to feel out after Him first before we can touch Him. We must really want to find Him,

we must care more about that than anything else, and we mustn't be afraid of Him. Don't you remember how, when you was a little girl, and you wanted somethin' that was in a dark room, you would feel round wild-like with your hands, a-shakin' and a tremblin' because you was afraid of the dark? And you couldn't find what you was after half so well? Well, if you could only have known right then, known for sure, that there was nothin' to be afraid of, because there was nothin' in the dark that could hurt you, you would 'ave found what you was after much easier, wouldn't you?"

"Yes, Uncle John."

"Now it seems to me as if that is just the way folks are tryin' to find God; a-feelin' round in the dark after Him, and a-shakin' and a-tremblin' because they are afraid when there's no need of it. If they should happen to touch Him when they were a-feelin' round this way they wouldn't know it, because they couldn't see in the dark, and were too afraid to be able to tell by the feelin'."

"Yes, Uncle John, I see. You mean that God may be near us, but that we do not know it, and will not be likely to find it out while we are afraid of Him."

"Yes. You see, Miss Murva, all the talkin' and preachin' puts God so far off that it's a-feelin in the dark and being scared all the time when you try to get hold of Him; and we don't dare to trust our own natural feelin's. Now I've read where it says that like as a father pities his children, so God pities us. Now I can understand that! I know just what that means, because I can feel it. Don't you suppose that I pity my girl, and love her more than ever since she went away? And I can't help it, because she needs it, poor child. Wouldn't I take her right up in my arms if I

could, and tell her that all I had was hers even if 'twas millions?"

And the old man's voice broke, while Murva felt that she could not trust her own to speak.

"Oh, can't I tell by my own feelin's for her how God must feel for me and for all of us? He's like a father, and He feels like a father, and He pities us and loves us a great deal more than He condemns us, I'm sure."

He was silent for a moment, while the trembling around his mouth told of his deeply-stirred feelings. Then, more as if he were talking to himself than to her, he continued,

"Could I be harsh to her one minute, my poor lamb? Condemn her for what she did because she was too tired to see just right? Speak cruel of her when I know that she will want to find her way back to me when she's had time to get rested? Oh, don't I know how the father went to meet his son that had left him for so long, and cried for joy when he saw him coming back, and had nothing but a welcome for him when he had him in his arms once more? If I can feel that, can't I feel God a little, too?"

Verily, the theology of the heart is widely different from the theology of the head.

Murva felt something in the old man's earnestness that stirred her, roused feelings which the sermons she had listened to had failed to do. He seemed to her to have climbed a mountain where he stood in the sunshine, while the others were waiting in the valley for the sun to rise.

And she longed to climb there also. Her never-ceasing desire for freedom seemed to grow stronger as

she heard his simple words and felt that he had truly found God for himself by feeling free to feel.

She longed to be free to feel after the life that lay before her. She could not be so bound down longer. She would rather feel around in the dark than to have her hands fastened as they were now; and the old longing, the old cry, O for love and freedom! rose to her lips and died there.

"Uncle John, do you believe we are ever prevented from doing what we ought to do?"

"Well, Miss Murva, it seems to me as we can't truly be; but because we don't make out to do a great deal we want to, we are apt to think that something stands in our way, and it ain't much use trying."

"But how are we to tell whether something we are striving to accomplish is what we ought to do or what we want to do?".

The old man pondered a moment before replying, and then said gently, "Sometimes we might tell by what it would cost us to give it up. What we want to do is mostly pleasanter than what we ought to do."

Again Murva felt that he was looking out from the mountain, while she was one of those in the valley. And as she walked home that afternoon she asked herself, could she give up her desire and remain in her father's house? And she could not answer Yes.

CHAPTER VII.

"TELL me honest, Doctor, if you think I'll last much longer?"

Dr. Crawford sat beside John Wilson and the old man's eyes were fixed upon his face. He did not answer at once, for every physician shrinks from such a question when he feels that the reply must be unwelcome. Most of us, suffer as we will, hold on to life, and are loath to give it up. But he had come to know the strength of character and power of self-control which the old man possessed, and he finally answered,

"I do not think the end is very far off for you, Mr. Wilson."

"Thank you, sir," said John, simply. "I felt that the spring had most run dry, and it's all right."

"Is there anything I can do for you, ? Anything you want arranged?"

"Well, sir, there's the bit of a house, that's all; and when I've got through with it I'd like it sold to pay you for all the expense you've been to for me. If I had more than enough for that I should leave it to my niece; but as it is, I can only leave her my lo——"

He stopped and Dr. Crawford turned away for a moment to hide what he felt. The old man's sincere love for Haddie, which even her heartless desertion could not lessen or turn aside, made him a hero in his eyes.

"If she comes back after I'm gone, if ever you see her again, you'll be sure to tell her that I loved her all the while; that never for a moment did I forget her, and that I'll keep on loving her after I'm dead, just the same. You'll tell her, won't you, Doctor?"

Donald nodded and pressed the old man's hand. If he could forgive his niece—nay! could not even admit that there was anything to forgive, surely he could remain quiet and cherish for her the loving message given to his keeping.

As he went about his daily duties, the picture of that old man dying alone in his helpless old age, so loyal in his love, so steadfast in his fearlessness, so brave and patient in his suffering, rose before him and took possession of one of the inner closets of his memory, thence to come forth in after days when he needed the help which example gives.

Murva came again that afternoon and found old John in the chair by the window. She saw how he was failing, and realised that only his hope of again catching a glimpse of his niece kept him sitting up with his little remaining strength.

He was always glad to see her, and this afternoon there seemed to be more satisfaction than usual in the greeting he gave her.

"It's all right, Miss Murva, about God!" he said, as she sat down by him. "I'm feeling Him more and more, and I know He won't cast me off when I get there and tell Him that I'm glad to get home!"

"Oh, Uncle John, what would I give to feel so sure as you do!" And Murva sighed heavily. "It looks so dark, turn every way you will, about everything. When one wants to do what is right, why can one not see the way?"

"You will see the way, Miss Murva, only don't you be afraid, but step right ahead if it's ever so dark, and carry what's yours to carry. There ain't any God that puts trouble on us for the sake of seein' us suffer, I am sure of that. And we'll get nothin' but love and pity for the blunderin' we do in our ignorance while we are children, who have got to grow up to know that there is a God who can feel for and help us. By-and-by it'll get light, Miss Murva."

"It surely is light for you, Uncle John; you seem to see so far."

"There's need to see far when one is going on a long journey, isn't there?" And the old man smiled as placidly as though he spoke of an everyday occurrence.

Murva looked at him quickly, and saw nothing but serenity in his face. She knew, for Dr. Crawford had told her, that Mr. Wilson would not probably outlast the summer; and while, at first, she had thought of his death as the inevitable, common to all, and even better for him than a lonely suffering life, she had come to have such a regard for him that now the thought gave her pain, and she felt as if something within herself would be strained and drawn upon when he was called to go.

She had the natural fear of death too, and she shivered slightly as she thought of its being a near fact for one who was now talking to her as a living man; one whom she could now see and hear and touch and who would soon be—what?

What was death? Did it open to something better than we have, or did it shut down over that, with all its pains and pleasures, covering both alike with blackness?

As if he divined what was passing in her mind, old John continued,

"Do you remember, Miss Murva, that poetry that Mr. Melton read at the funeral when Sam Bradford buried his wife? It begun that there wasn't any death and what seemed so was transition. That's the word, 'transition.'"

"Yes, I remember, Uncle John. It was Longfellow's 'Resignation;'" and she repeated in a low quiet tone, as if she were seeking to understand something as she spoke,

"There is no death! What seems so is transition;
This life of mortal breath
Is but a suburb of the life elysian
Whose portal we call death."

"Now I've been thinkin' out what that means—that 'transition,'" continued John, "and I can feel that, too. It seems to me that when I've been feelin' after God—tryin' to—that I could touch a door open somewhere, just a little ways open so that I could get a glimpse of what was on the other side of it; and I knew that if I could only step through it I'd be more livin' than I am now, for there seemed to be so much more room there. 'Twas like as if I was standin' in the dark with my hand out a-touchin' the door, and I could see that it was light, way in yonder, but I couldn't push it open far enough to get through out of the dark because I had to be called. I could hear voices through it, it seemed to me: not just like what we call voices, because it didn't sound like folks a-talkin'; but kinder like the way the organ down in the church sounds when they're a-playin' on it soft and gentle like, so that the music seems to come from ever so far off;

that's where you don't seem to hear it so much with your ears as you feel it some way in you, you know. And as I stand a-listenin' to those voices I know that by-and-by they'll call me, call me loud and strong, and then I shall just push the door open and walk right in out of the dark."

The old man's voice had grown lower as he talked, but deeper and stronger, till, as he ceased, the surety of his conviction made itself felt. And Murva, as she looked at him, could not but feel that the door was open far enough for some of the light to shine upon him now.

He was very still, and his eyes gazed afar off, but there was that in his face which gave Murva a new and strange feeling. It was as if something looked out through it at her, something which was not old John, and yet which was he, too, in a vague, intangible way, but was not part of that which sat in the chair before her. And the thought came to her that this must be the soul; that this must be what was going to step out of the dark into the light, and knew it; and that this was the transition which was going to leave what everybody called John Wilson to the common ground for all such, while his self went on higher.

Gradually his eyes came back to Murva, and as he caught her intent gaze he said, "It's all right, child, and it's easy too. Only don't you be afraid."

"Uncle John, what is the peace that passeth understanding? It seems to me that you must know?" asked Murva after a short silence.

"Well, Miss Murva, I don't know any of these things except for myself, only just as is satisfyin' to me, like; but it seems to me that it's to feel that way that other people can't understand unless they feel it too. It's

somethin' that words can't tell of, somethin' that's got no use for them; and when people try to find it by talkin' round after it, they never get hold of it that way. They've just got to settle things for themselves instead of thinkin' that other folks can settle 'em for 'em or they can never have no kind of peace. Now, when I can settle right down on what God is to me and ain't afraid to die to get a little nearer to Him, I can rest peaceful like; and other folks who think you've got to say and do just such things to save your soul, can't understand it."

"But what if they are right after all, Uncle John?"

"Well, I'll have plenty of time on the other side to find that out. And we've got plenty to do there, I reckon. That's another one of the things I can't quite see their way. I can't see much use in wearin' white robes and golden crowns and playin' on harps there, any more than here. I don't feel as if I'd be happy that way. I'd rather have some work to do; and it seems to me that when we are a-growin' all the time here we ought to keep on a-growin' over there. That other seems a kind o' standstill way o' livin', and I should think it would be better to find somethin' to do for somebody else than to sing praises all the time. There's somethin' kind o' selfish about that to me."

"Then this peace which passeth understanding is something no one can describe to us or tell us where to find? We must just seek it for ourselves, Uncle John?"

"Yes, child, that's the way it seems to me; and I guess that's the way it seemed to the one who wrote that psalm about the shepherd."

"'The Lord is my shepherd. I shall not want.' Is that the one you mean, Uncle John?"

"Yes, that's it. Go on."

"'He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: He leadeth me beside the still waters. He restoreth my soul: He leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for His name's sake. Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for——'"

"There! Stop right there!" cried John; "that's the whole thing. Just look at that and see what it means. 'Though I walk *through* the valley of the *shadow* of death.' Now don't you see that death is only something to be gone through and come out of all right on the other side. That you just walk through a shadow, as it were? When you walk along the street you walk right through that shadow of the house in front of you. You ain't afraid to step into it and go ahead, and you don't feel no different when you're walking in that than you do when you're walking somewhere else. You wouldn't do it if it didn't lay before you: you didn't put it there. But you can see that when you've got through it you're that much farther on your way. And see what he says too, the only thing is not to be afraid! I'll fear no evil, he says. Now it seems to me that good is stronger than evil, and if we'll just hold on to the goodness back of all things, there'll no evil hurt us in that valley or anywhere else."

"Why does it say 'valley' do you think, Uncle John?" asked Murva.

The old man mused for a moment, and then replied,

"You see it takes two mountains to make a valley, don't it?"

"Yes."

"Well, what we call here—what we call livin' now, is one o' them, and what we call the hereafter, or livin'

after we die, is the other one. And right between those two is that valley of death, which is nothin' but a shadow, a dark place, just because there is these two mountains. How can there help but be a low place when there's two high ones? And when one mountain stands in front of the other, of course that valley is dark because the first one keeps the light off. Do you see that?"

"Yes, Uncle John."

"Now if we're a-climbin' up the first mountain and have got to go to the second mountain; if we can't get around it and have got to go right up over it, we've got to go right on to its top and then go down on the other side till we get to the valley, haven't we? And then we've got to keep right on till we get to the other mountain, and then *I* think we've got to climb that. I don't think our climbin' is all done in this world."

"Oh, Uncle John, if we could only know what that life is like! We know what this is, but we do not know that, and the uncertainty is like a weight dragging upon one."

"Just look round you, child, and see what this that we do see shows us. Does anything here ever stop? Isn't there action goin' on all the time? We see it in the spring and all through the summer when things is a growin'; but when the winter comes and we don't see it we might think there isn't any. But don't you know that it's a workin, away just the same while we don't see it as it did when everything was a growin'? And won't there more come from that workin' that's goin' on so still? I don't see any stoppin' place anywhere. All things have their seasons, as folks say; and so, of course, these seasons come to an end. But that which makes these *seasons* come to an end, goes right on

through 'em and after 'em. So I should think 'twas safe to think that if this life does come to an end, that what's been workin' in it will keep right on workin'. Now if I'm goin' to walk through that valley it'll be because I've walked over that mountain and got *to* it. And do you suppose that if I can walk through it—and the one that wrote that psalm says we do,—that I'm a goin' to stop walkin' when I get to that other mountain? Why, I'm a-goin' to climb that too, and a-goin' to see more and more as I go up? And so are all of us a-goin' too, Miss Murva. God ain't got any use for do-nothin's."

Murva felt that John Wilson's convictions, though he hadn't got religion according to the church brethren's ideas, were equally good to live or die by; and the fancy grew with her that it was not what other people called John Wilson that was showing her so much, but that something, the soul, whatever that was, which was standing nearer to the light and looking into it, and telling what it saw to her.

She had a strange sense of duality as she looked at and listened to him. In one way there were two of him and yet in another, only one. And she seemed to have the same sense about herself; as if one of her could reach out with him into that light and see for itself, and the other could not.

She was roused by the striking of the clock, and saw that she must soon be on her way home if she would be there when her father arrived. She had been very careful not to have him miss her when he came home lest he should need her services and, irritated at her absence, forbid her going to John Wilson's any more.

"Shall I tell Mrs. Wood that you want to go to bed, Uncle John?" she asked as she rose to go. "You

have been sitting up a long time now, and you must be tired."

The old man turned his head so that he could look up the street again and hesitated a moment; then said, "No, thank you, Miss Murva, I'll not go just yet. Somehow I feel like waitin' a little longer."

"Then good-bye, Uncle John. I must go now; but I will try to come again to-morrow, or, if not then, as soon as I can," and she took one of his hands in hers.

With great effort he moved his other hand so that he could place it over her own and said, "Yes, Miss Murva, I know you will when you can, for you have been very good to me; and so I want to ask you just one thing more. If ever my girl needs help and kindness, and you are where she is, you'll try to befriend her, won't you?"

And he looked at her with a pleading in his face that nothing human could have withstood.

"Oh, surely, Uncle John! Indeed I will if ever I have the opportunity."

"Thank you, and God bless you, my child!" he said as he turned his face once more to the window. "Now I'm ready. There's nothing more that I can do."

The tears sprang to Murva's eyes and, stooping over him, she kissed his forehead. A faint and beautiful smile passed over his face, but he did not speak or turn his eyes from the street up which he gazed.

Murva turned to go out into the kitchen where Mrs. Wood was, looking back as she reached the door. But he did not stir, did not seem to notice that she had gone.

"Have you all you need until to-morrow, Mrs. Wood?" she asked her before stepping into the yard.

"Oh, yes, ma'am, thank you! Mrs. Melton brought a basket full this morning, and we've got plenty."

Murva passed out through the gate and down the street, trying to still the feelings which had been so deeply stirred, and banish their traces from her face.

She never liked to appear before her father and stepmother with any signs of emotion. With no encouragement from either of them to show her real nature, and the habit of repression so fixed as to become a tomb for it, she indulged in exhibitions of feeling only in the privacy of her own room.

Suddenly she became aware that some one was calling her name, and that the sound came from behind her. She turned and looking back saw Mrs. Wood at the gate, waving her apron up and down.

She ran hastily back, with a cold feeling at her heart. "What is it, Mrs. Wood?" she said.

"Oh, Miss!" exclaimed the woman, as she seized Murva's arm: "I don't know what has happened, but I'm afeared. Just as you went down the street I heard him cry out so loud that I ran in, an' there he was a-standin' right up on his feet with his arms stretched way out. 'She's a-comin',' sez he, and his face was shinin' like I never see. And then, all of a sudden, he dropped right down in his chair, all together like, and I ran out after you."

Murva went quickly into the house and to John Wilson's side, the woman following her. She had never seen death, but she had no need for anyone to tell her what this was.

The organ voices had called. He had pushed the door open and stepped out of the dark into the light.

CHAPTER VIII.

MURVA'S twenty-first birthday was coming nearer and nearer. She had planned to go to Kate's home a month before it, and remain till after the wedding, which had been fixed for the middle of October. She had not yet broached the subject to her father, but knew that she must do so at once in order to keep her promise to Kate. She felt that the whole matter would be easier if she were not at home on the day she became legally her own mistress; and she shrank from the explosion which she knew would come if she had to tell her father, face to face, that she was going to leave his house because she would not any longer submit to his tyranny.

Her stepmother watched her narrowly; had seemed to try to hear what they had talked about when Kate was with her; and appeared to be well satisfied, for she had not been as nagging as formerly.

The poor woman imagined that when Murva was out of her way and she had Mr. Kroom all to herself, she would find him much easier to get along with, for he would have no one but her to turn to, then. And she had a kind of love for him; that which belongs to certain natures for those who master them.

Murva did not feel that she was running away from anything she ought to face by going as if for a visit.

Once away, she could the easier maintain her posi-

tion; and if she could avoid a struggle, so much the better for both of them.

Her father opened the way for her by asking, one evening, if Kate Melton was not going to be married pretty soon.

Murva saw her opportunity. "Yes, sir," she replied; "and I am to be her bridesmaid."

"Humph! That means, I suppose, that you will want a new dress for the occasion?" This in a tone which implied an unusual willingness for him.

"I should be very glad to have one," answered Murva. "The wedding is to take place the middle of next month, and Kate wishes me to spend the month before it with her. I wish it very much also."

"Go there and stay a whole month!" ejaculated Mr. Kroom, looking at her in astonishment.

"Yes, sir. And I should like to go the day after to-morrow," replied Murva quietly, without seeming to notice his amazement.

"Why, you must be crazy to think of such a thing!" he went on. "You have never been away a month from home in your life; and I want you every little while. You know that. What are you thinking of?"

"Father," said Murva, looking at him steadily, "Kate is my dearest friend, almost the only one I have; and after she is married things will be very much changed. She cannot be just the same to me and I want to have her in the old way all I can till then. If I never have been away from home, is it not time I made a beginning? One cannot stay a child for always."

Mr. Kroom did not speak. He was struck more by Murva's manner than by her words, though they seemed to convey something which he could not yet understand.

What was there about her that was new to him? What made him feel so uncomfortable all at once? Why, was it a woman who was talking to him and not a child? Nonsense! She was his child and always would be. Wasn't he her father?

Suddenly it struck him that Murva had not asked permission to go, in her old way. She had not asked him if she could go, but had told him that she wished to go. This was what was new and strange.

He looked at her. Her eyes were cast down, and she was very quiet; but there was something in her face which puzzled him and which he did not like. She seemed to be at a distance from him, some way, and getting farther and farther every moment.

He took some money from his pocket and laid it down beside her, saying, "There is the money for your dress. You can get that and can go for two or three days before the wedding; but that's enough." And he left the room without waiting for any reply. A moment after they heard the street door close behind him.

Murva sat still and silent in her chair. Mrs. Kroom watched her. She had taken no part in what had been going on, but none of it had escaped her. She saw that her husband did not intend to let Murva go, and there was too much at stake for her, for this plan to fall through.

"Well, what are you going to do now?" she broke out suddenly.

Murva started. She had forgotten that she was not alone, but she made no reply.

"Well, if you stand that, you've got precious little spunk in you. The idea of bein' kept a baby that can't be let to go away from home, at your age! You'd better

make that dress into a short frock. It'd be more suitable ! " and she laughed contemptuously.

The colour flashed to Murva's face, and rising suddenly she turned toward her stepmother; but even as she opened her mouth to speak, the words of old John came to her, "We mustn't think hard of people as doesn't know any better ! " And shutting her lips firmly together, she went out of the room and up the stairs to her own.

Mrs. Kroom looked after her as she went. " Humph ! She acts as if I was beneath her ! 'She's got her mother's dignity,' her father says. I s'pose that's a sample of it."

Deep down in Mrs. Kroom's heart was another reason for the irritation which she always felt over Murva. She knew that the girl's mother still held a place in Mr. Kroom's heart that was closed to her. That dead hand covered it away from her, and she was powerless even to knock at it. And with all the futile spite of a small nature she vented her jealousy of the dead upon the living.

Murva closed her door and sank wearily down on the side of her bed, safe at last in the only haven of refuge her father's house afforded her. Here, at least, she could be free from the coarse taunts which assailed her below, for her stepmother rarely came to her room when she was in it. So much she was able to command for herself.

What next ? was the question. Go she would, and she would not steal away as if she had no right to herself. If she could do no better she would wait till her birthday came, and then walk out of the open door.

Time passed as she sat revolving ways and means, and finally she heard her father come home; then for

some time their voices below. She was able to come to no new conclusions, for she recognised her father's legal right to obedience till the day she was twenty-one years old; and she went to bed heavy-hearted, though that day of deliverance was so near at hand.

Meanwhile Mr. Kroom had broached the subject of Murva's dress to his wife, and suggested her helping with it.

"Help her? I don't know why I should!" ejaculated Mrs. Kroom. "It's little enough she helps me with all her runnin' round visitin' and that scribblin' for you!"

"You can't say but that Murva does a good deal of work," returned Mr. Kroom. "There can't anybody belonging to me live without it."

"Well! She can do hers and I'll stick to mine," replied his wife. "All the same, you'd better let her go as she wants to."

Advice from his wife was so new to Mr. Kroom that he was too surprised to reply immediately. He had not only discouraged it before the honeymoon was over, but had told her plainly that he did not want it and would not have it unless he asked for it. And the occasions were rare when Nicholas Kroom felt the need of any one's opinion but his own.

"What do you mean?" he demanded finally. "Why should I let her go away for a whole month?"

"Well, perhaps it won't make much difference whether you do or not."

Not much difference whether he allowed it or not!—he, Nicholas Kroom!

He took a step towards her.

"What do you mean by talking this way? Speak out what you've got in your mind!"

"Well, ain't the girl got a birthday pretty soon?"

"What if she has?"

"Ain't she twenty-one?"

He sat down suddenly. Twenty-one? Not till that moment did it flash upon him that Murva was nearly of legal age.

Well! What if she was? Was she not his child just the same! And did she not belong to him and where he was? Had he not a right to control her as long as he lived, and didn't she owe him obedience no matter how old she was? What difference should it make to her whether she were twenty-one next birthday or twenty?

Something within him suddenly said, "What difference did it make with you?"

He remembered feeling on that day that henceforth no one should rule him. That at last he stood where he could not be compelled against his will; and the thought came to him, what if his child felt that way now? But this he would not admit; would not harbour for a moment. The case was very different. Murva was well provided for, and then she was a girl and that made a difference. Girls could not be as independent as boys and had to be taken care of; and of course they should recognise this fact and appreciate it.

But what if Murva should insist upon her newly-acquired right to do as she pleased? What if she should insist upon going to Kate's, even if he did not give her permission? What if she should go away altogether?

Ah! This possibility was too much. He started to his feet and walked hastily up and down the room.

His wife watched him for a moment in silence; but her own anxiety as to the outcome was too great to

allow her to remain so. Yet she was also too shrewd to jeopardise the chances in favour of her desire by showing him that she knew Murva did not mean to come back at all, and so inciting him to strong measures to keep her at home.

Meanwhile something unaccustomed was tugging at Nicholas Kroom's heart-strings. Something like affection was struggling into his consciousness at the thought of living without his daughter.

Mrs. Kroom broke the silence with, "You'd better let her go when she wants to; she'll be the readier to stay at home afterwards. Since John Wilson died she hain't seemed jest as she did before."

He had not noticed that Murva was any different; she was always quiet. Only to-day he had felt something which he did not understand; and this, with the sudden revelation of her possible emancipation from his authority, disturbed him far more than any happiness or unhappiness of hers could do.

But there was some sense in what his wife said. He could see that the wisest course in the face of any possible trouble with Murva, through a disposition to exercise her newly-acquired right, was to grant her request. The difficulty in the way was the refusal he had already given; for Nicholas Kroom was a man who prided himself on always standing by what he had said. Is it a common mistake to construe a blind obstinacy for strength of purpose?

"You needn't say anything more about it," he finally said, turning to his wife. "I'll attend to the matter, and please remember that you have nothing to do with it. Now it is time to get to bed."

Her father looked at her scrutinisingly when Murva appeared at breakfast the next morning. She did not

seem to notice it, and was more preoccupied than was usual in her father's presence. There was a look of decision in her face which he did not like, and he fingered the breakfast things nervously.

The meal passed almost in silence, Mrs. Kroom being content to let the leaven work which she had used the night before; and Murva was too near action on her own account to make her usual attempts at conversation.

As they rose from the table Mr. Kroom said, "There's some work at the store which I want you to do, and after it is finished you can go to Kate Melton's and stay until after the wedding."

Murva looked up quickly, surprised at this change in his decision; for never in her life had she known him to relent when he had once refused what she desired. He did not meet her look, but passed hastily out of the house..

Murva went about that morning with an unusual lightness in her step, stopping now and then for a short daydream over the possibilities before her.

"Ah! freedom will be sweet!" she said half aloud, as she roused herself to finish what she had to do.

Her stepmother caught the words. "Humph! Wait till you get a husband, if you think the time you've had so far is a hard one!" was her comment.

CHAPTER IX.

DOES anyone believe that two girls who are warm, close friends can occupy the same room and go to bed and sleep early, when one of them is to be married in two or three days?

Though it was nearly midnight, Murva sat on the side of the bed with Kate's traveling hat poised on one finger.

"Kate, what is marriage?" she asked suddenly.

"Why! What do you mean?" asked Kate.

"I mean what does marriage mean?"

"I think it means that two people shall be so drawn together through their mutual love as to grow into one another; grow till they think and act as one instead of two," answered Kate. "Marriage is natural, and all human beings gravitate toward it."

"But why is it natural?" persisted Murva.

"Why, because we are made so, I suppose."

"But why are we made so?"

"Oh, Murva," laughed Kate, "you are getting beyond me. I am sure I do not know."

"But do you never try to think it out," said Murva, still serious. "I do. I try and try."

"Yes, dear. You have the burrowing tendency well developed, I know. You think too much. Your stepmother says you are always 'mooning round,' and I am not sure but that she is nearly right. I have

stood right before you and spoken to you when you neither saw nor heard me, no more than if I were miles away."

"But, Kate, how could I live if I did not think? And how do people live that do not think? Why, sometimes, if I have been ever so unhappy and can only get away by myself and sit down and think, the annoyances and worries after a little while, slip away, for I seem to go away from them; and something wakes and stirs within me that seems so strong and powerful. Something that seems more myself than what I see as myself; and I feel as if I could achieve such grand things, could conquer all obstacles: as if there was nothing I could not accomplish if I only acted quickly, vigorously. And then I want to spring up and out, but something seems to say, "Wait! Wait for the fullness of the time!"

And Murva's voice sank lower and ceased while her eyes glowed with a light which seemed to come from a long way off while they looked inward along its track; her face wore a look which Kate had never seen there before, and which awed her for a moment.

"Oh, Murva! Come back! You are farther off than ever now!" she said in a hushed tone.

Murva relaxed and looked at her friend with her natural expression, yet which had a lingering trace of the inward shining, and continued.

"You know, Kate dear, that I must live more within myself than most young women do, for all my life I have been driven there: and I suppose it makes me queer, as most people would call it. I have been thinking a great deal since old John died. He showed me much that I never saw before, and it only makes me eager for more. I want to know the why of all

things—of myself most of all. And I seem trying to feel after it. That was the way he had to find God, and he was satisfied. There is a great mystery in marriage, it seems to me."

Morning found them brisk and busy. Donald was coming to lunch, and they were to settle some deferred arrangements of the rooms they should occupy when they returned. Murva was to remain with Mr. and Mrs. Melton while Kate and Donald were away, and in a fortnight they were to come back to the new old home.

Kate was standing at the window, watching for her husband-soon-to-be. Suddenly she called, "Why! who is that with Donald? Murva, come and see"

Murva went quickly to her side and saw Dr. Crawford nearly at the gate. With him was a stranger, a young man little more than his own age. The newcomer was of medium height, with a strongly built figure, a step more vigorous than Donald's, yet that did not cover the ground as effectively. He had the appearance of falling to the rear, though walking faster; blonde hair and a short curling beard with a moustache a little darker in colour which almost entirely concealed his mouth.

So much Kate and Murva saw before the gentlemen reached the doorstep, and Kate recovered sufficiently from her surprise to be ready to receive them.

"Kate, this is one of my old college friends," said Donald as he drew her towards them. "He found me out this morning, and so I brought him with me. Miss Melton—Mr. Harold Deering."

Kate extended her hand cordially to Mr. Deering who bowed before her with an ease of manner not common to the average youth of Millville.

"I was most happy to hear of my friend's good fortune, and am still more gratified at being able to assure myself of the fact," he said as he released it.

Donald did not seem to feel that he was to be deprived of his welcoming kiss because of a newcomer; and Kate, with an added glow in her cheeks, turned to her friend.

"Murva dear, let me introduce to you Mr. Deering —Miss Kroom."

His eyes rested upon her as she looked at him. He came toward her, but she did not put out her hand. She felt stilled, as if she had no impulse to movement, and her response to his "I am very glad to meet Miss Melton's friend," was almost inaudible.

She did not even move as they took seats; not till Kate exclaimed laughingly, "Come, Murva! Come back! Have your dream out some other time!"

Then she came to herself, with a feeling that she must have been guilty of one of her often-declared-against peculiarities, if not of actual rudeness.

"I was passing through Millville on my way to New York," Mr. Deering was saying as she sat down; "and knowing that my friend Donald Crawford had become a full fledged M.D., and was located here, I thought I would stop for a day or two and see if his remembrance of college days and incidents was as vivid as mine."

Mr. Deering proved himself a most entertaining companion. He had travelled much, had been seeing the world while Dr. Crawford had been working for a position and a future. He seemed unusually well-informed, and talked on different subjects with Mr. Melton during lunch, in a manner which showed his intellectual capacities to be far above the average. He manifested a hearty admiration for the bride to be, and

treated Mr. and Mrs. Melton with a courteous deference which won their hearts.

Murva bore but little part in the conversation. Always reticent in the presence of strangers, she experienced now an added desire to remain quiet and unnoticed. She did not want to talk; she wanted only to listen and find out, if she could, what made her feel so strangely when she first looked into Mr. Deering's eyes.

She gazed at him intently now and then when no one was observing her. He was not what she would have called a handsome man. His face and form were not exceptional in any way; and yet there was something which made him stand out from those she had met in Millville and who seemed like a background which served to throw him into stronger relief.

Without knowing it or meaning to do so, Murva was studying him; and suddenly he looked in her direction and straight into her eyes as they were fastened upon his face.

Again that peculiar feeling stole over her. The others were talking at the time and noticed nothing. His look seemed to hold her; she could not turn away; could not take her eyes from his face and—was it true? —she did not want to. For an instant only he held her thus, though it seemed to her minutes, and then turned to Dr. Crawford with an inquiry as to the character of Millville industries.

Murva felt like jumping from her chair and running from the room. She was sure that if she could have seen his mouth she would have seen a smile there. Who was he? What was he? What did he mean by making her feel this way? What was the matter with her that she should feel so?

He paid no further attention to her and declined an invitation to remain when Dr. Crawford announced the necessity for his departure. He thanked them for their kindly reception of a stranger, and begged its continuance if he should remain in Millville longer than for the day or two he had intended.

"Well, Murva! what do you think of him?" was Kate's first question after the door had closed behind them.

"I do not know," Murva replied.

"Well, you dear noncommittal child,"—Kate was the younger of the two, but she was going to be married, so Murva was the child,—"you will find out in your own good time I suppose. Meanwhile, if Donald wishes it, and I suppose he will, he must be asked to the wedding if he remains here. Then he will fall to you to be taken care of, and so you will have further opportunity to make up your mind."

"Is he a very great friend of Donald's, Kate? I do not remember ever having heard him spoken of."

"Hardly! Donald tells me that he never knew him intimately, though they were quite good friends, as college friendships go. He says that Mr. Deering was liked by almost everyone; that he was always ready to join in whatever was going on, and was very liberal with his money; while at the same time he was always well up in his studies, though never seeming to work hard. He remembers that he thought him capable of reaching almost anything he chose to try for, and wondering what he would do with his abilities."

"I should think that a man could be anything he tried to be—reach any position he aimed for. Men are not hedged about like women; they are free to choose and act for themselves," said Murva.

"What would you choose if you were a man, Murva?" asked Kate.

"Oh! I don't know, Kate!" answered Murva, as she leaned back in her chair and raised her arms over her head, drawing a long breath. "But this I do know: I would be a man, through and through; I would be too strong to pander to and excuse my own weakness; hold too lofty ideals to be content with anything mediocre; be too honest to falsify for the sake of power or place; be more anxious to have and hold my own self-respect than to appear what I was not in the eyes of others."

"Well, Murva, I do not see that one has to be a man to achieve this. Isn't it just as necessary for a woman?" answered Kate quietly.

Late that evening Dr. Crawford and Harold Deering sat in the office-sanctum, enveloped in the blue haze of numberless cigars, indulging in mutual reminiscences and comparing views on men, women, and things.

Mr. Deering had announced his intention of stopping in Millville for a little time till he should be more strongly inclined to move on.

"You see," said he, "without near ties as I am, and not yet definitely settled upon the future, I go or stay as my humour leads me. I have thought of settling in New York shortly. Your future is all laid out, I see. You know just what you are aiming at?"

"Yes," answered Donald. "I consider my profession one of the noblest to follow. I know of none which offers more possibilities for helping one's fellow-men. And when, added to my satisfaction with my chosen work, I am going to have for a wife one of the dearest little women the sun ever shone upon, I know of no one with whom I would change places."

"I am glad for you, old boy; most heartily glad.

You must feel quite rooted, as it were, and all ready to grow and spread your branches as a grateful shade for those belonging to you. As for me, my time is to come. I am not yet quite ready to have my freedom curtailed."

"Don't you think that a man has about as much freedom in the marriage relation as is good for him?" asked Donald.

"Well, that depends!" answered Deering. "If he takes it at the outset, so much the better for the future. I do not see why having a wife should make a man change the whole course of his life as some seem to think it must. Of course a man expects to treat his wife well. Only a cad or a brute would do otherwise. But if a woman were too exacting, things would not be apt to run very smoothly; and it seems to me to be the part of wisdom to begin as you mean to hold out."

"What do you mean by exactions which would be unreasonable?" asked Donald.

"Well it seems to be the idea of some women that a husband belongs to them so exclusively, he has no right to his time outside of his business hours, or to inclinations which they do not share. He must consult all their wishes, great and small; go out if they wish to go, stay at home if they wish to stay. He must have no individual life left of his own, except such as he finds in his business occupations. He must be what is termed a family man, in the broadest sense of the word, or he is an unkind husband. Now it does not accord with some men's nature to be this kind of a family man; and I am one of them."

"I see," said Donald. "We do not all run in the same groove of course. Now give me your idea as to a satisfactory wife!"

"Well, I have only a general idea on that subject; but I should naturally want her to be a woman who would supplement me in all ways. Who would seek to understand my nature and disposition, so as to accommodate herself to my idiosyncrasies; and who would recognise that I could not be tied down to that sphere which naturally belonged to her. She should be capable of entertaining my friends when I wished it; but see that I, naturally, had pleasures and even duties outside of her province, and with which she would have nothing to do. I should want her to be gentle and loving, of course; not in any way approaching the emancipated woman. That is a species I cannot tolerate."

Donald remained silent. It seemed to him as if these views savoured very strongly of selfishness. And yet he remembered Harold Deering's open-handed liberality; his readiness to join in whatever was proposed by others; remembered that he was always considered "a thorough good fellow," as could hardly have been the case were he prone to follow his own inclinations, only.

"Do you not think that the thought of undue restraint in marriage is more irksome than the fact?" he asked finally. "Or rather that experience after marriage would show these anticipations overdrawn when the whole heart and soul is held by the woman one has loved and married?"

"I do not think," answered Deering, "that I am prepared to admit that a man's whole heart and soul are or should be held by a woman; if by that is meant that he is so thoroughly possessed by her and of her as to feel that without her life would be worthless. While I admire and enjoy the poetry and romance which make woman something to worship and to die for, I do not see the necessity or even the advisability

of making this poetry and romance the rule of living in the present day. These are much more enchanting and possible in the dim distance than with a nearer view. The effort to make the present actual the faithful reproduction of the poet's and the romance writer's conceptions is what has brought, to so many, the sickening disappointment which has ended in despair or an uncomplaining acceptance of what could not be changed; and which has made men content with only mediocre achievements when they were capable of far more. That expectation which assumes the ideal to be the actual is bound to have a fall and bruise itself on the natural level of things."

"But surely you recognise that love is an actual and potent factor to-day, as much as when men and women gave all the world for love and counted it well lost; and that it should be the cause of and basis for the marriage relation?" asked Dr. Crawford.

"Yes, the love that rational men and women recognise as such," answered Deering; "but not that which romantic enthusiasts talk of as everlasting and undying; which swallows up everything else in itself forever more."

"And do you not believe in a love which knows no diminution and no end?"

"No, frankly, I do not; neither do I see any evidence of such about me. What do the facts show to anyone who keeps his eyes open? I have passed the years since leaving college in observation, and this is what I see. Of the married people in any given community, and one is a fair sample of another, by far the larger proportion show that they get along together. That from motives of expediency, and also often from a sense of duty, I must admit, as well, they adapt themselves to

each other, so as to preserve a fair appearance of unanimity; but the effort with which this is maintained is quite visible to the thoughtful observer. Of the minority the larger number do not even make this effort, and their lack of agreement and unfitness for each other does not require a close observer to be seen. Some of these make a strike for freedom through the divorce courts, and the others, deeming this experience the greater evil and punishment of the two, remain as they are. But we hear little from any of these about the poetry and romance of love. The remaining few are those who seem to be so suited to and satisfied with each other as to warrant the claims made for romantic love as the key to married happiness; but I notice that even with these there is often remarriage when death has taken the one and left the other. Therefore this much vaunted undying love proves itself to be mortal in nature instead of immortal; for were it the latter, it would survive separation by death or otherwise; and its possessor would not be able to join himself to a second divinity as he had to the first, and even to a third as is frequent. To me, this observation of facts shows that actual love is adaptable; and that ideal love remains ideal. By its remoteness it is untouchable."

"I can see that you have never been in love," said Dr. Crawford.

"There, you are wrong, my wise friend, for I have been in that miserable delightful state of mind more than once."

"That admission proves that you have never been really in love," declared Dr. Crawford energetically.

"But your real is the ideal we have been talking about, you see, which will be the actual when we have ideal men and women, not before. I have been like

the majority of our sex, neither better nor worse; and have had those experiences, serious and otherwise, which usually precede marriage and the position of the family man—a metamorphosis the reverse of the grub and the butterfly. And I have come to see that a rational view of love and its sequence would adjust matters and preserve harmonious relations with less effort and friction than the idealistic one."

"What would you call the rational view?" asked Donald.

"Well, first, recognition of the incontrovertible fact that woman meets a need in man, and that marriage is the consequence of and is founded upon this fact; therefore that this is her natural mission, upon the fulfilment of which married happiness depends. This need may be called spiritual, mental, moral, and physical; though, speaking for myself, what is termed the strictly spiritual is a need I do not specially feel, or, for that matter, the mental either. But as enduring and progressive civilization must, probably, be the result of enduring family relations, it behooves a man to have as the mother of his children a woman who recognises her true relation to her husband and to them, and confines herself to the discharge of her natural duties. Neglect or inability on her part must inevitably produce consequences which may be serious, for her place is the home, to which her nature and her natural mission confine her. The husband's field of action is outside the home; and, being a wider and a different one, more liberty of action is inevitable for him; and so long as he discharges the duties which are required of him as a husband and father, his liberty should remain unrestricted. For, whatever he may do, the consequences to the family are not so disastrous as those that are pos-

sible through the wife; and the demands of his nature may lead him into what sentimentalists would decry, though the wife is in nowise affected thereby in what she is as the wife. I maintain that the difference in nature between the man and the woman restricts her where it liberates him; and that this view is common to ninety-nine out of every hundred of our sex, whether avowed or not, and is acted upon, *sub-rosa*, when the ideal love fails to leave its lofty abode and dwell in the every-day life of mankind."

"Do you think women are likely to have this rational view of marriage?" asked Dr. Crawford quietly.

"No, I do not," frankly answered Deering. "Women are natural idealists, and can rarely understand the hard, prosaic facts. A woman idealises a man inevitably. She simply cannot comprehend him as he really is; because she is incapable of understanding the man-nature till she has had experience through marriage which develops that understanding; and so, when this experience has forced some of its results upon her, she thinks he has changed. No, woman's love will be romantic love to the end of the chapter. So much the more need for the man to understand his own position, and hold and guide, with a firm hand, the impulses and impetuous demands of the wife."

Mr. Deering paused, leaned back in the chair from which he had bent toward his companion in his earnestness, and smoked vigorously as if to make up for the time lost. Both were silent for a few minutes, Dr. Crawford seeming specially serious and thoughtful. Finally he said,

"There may be some truth in what you have declared, but I am also sure that it is possible for a man to have for a woman a love like hers for him,—a love pure and

perfect, which nothing can destroy; a love which shall continually feed and satisfy that higher nature which alone is fitted to survive, whatever the demands of the lower. And with this mutual love she will guide and even protect him as much as he will her. Yet, as a physician, I am compelled to recognise the whole nature and admit that, as a rule, certain needs are stronger with the one sex than with the other; and that greater happiness and harmony will be the consequence with those marriages in which these needs are met; and that where this is not the case the utmost care will be required to preserve the conditions upon which confidence and peace are maintained. As I have found in my professional experience, there are times when a wife's happiness depends upon her ignorance, and when the husband from the physician's point of view, could not justly be condemned. There are many perplexing questions which future generations will have to settle; I doubt if the present one will or can." And he rose from his chair and paced the room thoughtfully.

"Yes; as a physician if not as a man, you must admit that ideal marriage is not what we have in this nineteenth century as actual marriage. And, as a physician, you can see at least one good and sufficient reason why. That beatific state in which the one lives only for the other, giving no thought to anything which does not minister directly to that other, incapable of a desire for anything apart from that only beloved one, exists, possibly, for some women because of their weaker and dependent nature; but, so far as men are concerned, it is a myth. To me, a man is far more of a man who is incapable of it. It is only the youth with experience all before him who, indulging in dreams of love, imagines this future as his own. You and I know that

these dreams, and a young girl's as well, are so very rarely realised as not to afford one single instance in the range of one's married acquaintances, though among these there may be a minority who would declare themselves very happy and content. Yet with both the husband and the wife there is something each has expected and has not realised; while with the majority, if the wife spoke her feeling, she would declare herself wronged because of this lack of realisation."

"Ah, Deering!" exclaimed Dr. Crawford, "woman's wrongs are a fact, not a fancy! While there are sensitive and imaginative women who make for themselves much that otherwise would not exist, there are too many who are groaning under very real ones, and who see no way to be rid of them except by that course which would be, to them, the greater evil of the two."

"Granted, Doctor. There are many men, yet, in whom the brute is uppermost; but we are not speaking of these. I mean those who have a right to be called gentlemen. Such will never abuse a woman; but a majority of the wives of this class may, and most likely will, feel themselves wronged because their ideal of married life is not fulfilled. There is a deal of needless sentimentality expended in this direction, to my mind. Recognition of necessary facts which are the consequence of human needs would lessen these largely imaginary wrongs. For myself, I cannot see how a woman is in any wise defrauded when her husband provides for her and her children to the utmost of his ability, and when his treatment of her is unfailingly kind and courteous, if he maintains some individual life of his own outside of the family circle. And if women were not so disposed to believe the ideal the real, did not cultivate that natural tendency with inces-

sant romance reading, they would not experience the disappointment which they—misunderstanding, because blind to its cause—construe as a wrong of which the husband is the author."

"But, Deering, is not a woman wronged when her husband does not give her his whole love?" asked Dr. Crawford.

"Is a woman wronged when her husband gives her all he is capable of giving and it does not come up to her expectations?" returned Harold Deering. "The whole question resolves itself into understanding the nature of a man. Women cannot have this understanding till they have had experience; and experience upsets their preconceived views and dispels their fond illusions. Then they cry out because they are hurt and, feeling hurt, deem themselves wronged when the man has only been consistent with himself: has been acting according to his nature, which marriage cannot change. Therefore I say that the rational view of love and marriage must supersede the idealistic one; and that the marriage entered upon with this view will give promise of more satisfaction than one based upon the other. Yet I know that at present it is the man, the husband, who must hold it and who must act according to it, guiding the wife, who is the weaker of the two; for woman is emphatically the weaker vessel, and much depends upon the strength and firmness of the husband. The love which a man has for his wife is totally different from the possible feeling he may have for another woman. That love is all for her; he gives it all to her; but there is always the possibility that his nature demands other outlets; and when this is the case there is no wrong to the wife who has all that belongs to the wife. It is only her sentiment, only

the falsely grounded and artificial sentimentality which is called conjugal affection, that deems itself outraged."

"But, Deering!" exclaimed Dr. Crawford, "faithfulness in the marriage relation is demanded alike by the law of God and of man. It is the very foundation of the family and of society; and the perpetuity of our civilization, the progress of the human race, depends upon it. It seems to me that you are demanding that freedom in the marriage relation which must imperil this consequence: and that the practical application of your theories would bring about a woeful condition of things."

"Well, my fearful friend, take a good square look at the condition which is—which prevails at this present moment—and what do you see? Does not honesty compel you to admit that what you call conjugal faithfulness is the exception and not the rule? One might as well throw aside the spectacles of ideal love and its consequent sentimentality and look this fact squarely in the face. Refusing to see it cannot make it less a fact. Poetry, romance, and religion have all declared the beauties of conjugal love and faithfulness: and whatever may be said of the former, the latter, at least, belongs to poetry, romance and religion still: not to real life. The exceptions only prove the rule. While a woman may, and must, remain faithful to her conjugal partner in all respects: while she can do this with far less effort than the man, because her needs are less and because hers is the dependent nature, he can and will have more liberty of action, as the stronger and the independent one of the two. And these very facts are the inevitable results of the differing natures of man and woman. Nature will speak for itself in spite of sentiment and lofty ideas; speak

with the loudest voice of all, and by appearing not to hear it we imagine that what it says is unrecognised. But while we are all so becomingly deaf for each other, individually we are heeding and following her behests; yet doing this privately, while publicly we are worshippers at the shrine of conjugal love and faithfulness?"

Dr. Crawford did not reply as Harold Deering ceased. He looked very serious, and his cigar had gone out in his fingers. He was upon the verge of his own marriage and the other's statements had presented questions which had not before confronted him for answer. Did he love Kate Melton? Emphatically, yes! Did he feel that he should continue to love, through a lifetime, her only, no other woman drawing him for a moment from what he recognised as conjugal love and faithfulness? Yes! Her only, for life and in death.

He loved her with that love which his friend decried. Would it survive the wear and tear of daily living in that future which he had no power to see except as it became the present? Yes! he felt that it would.

He had the sensation of something very murky and unpleasant which affected him, to some extent, physically. His chair was not comfortable; his clothing restricted his breathing; there was a taste in his mouth which did not come from his cigar. But through all this was a feeling growing stronger and stronger within him, strong enough to rise over these and declare itself in the conviction that, argument, evidence, and the manifest weaknesses of human nature to the contrary notwithstanding, there was a love above and beyond any conception of Harold Deering's which was a fact, not a poetical fancy, and which could and

would be proved in living demonstrations in the world.

Deering waited in silence also. He had spoken far more freely than he had any idea of doing when he began, and he wondered why he had done so. He noticed that Dr. Crawford's cigar was out, and he struck and offered him a light. Donald roused from his abstraction but declined the offer. He had no further desire for smoking that night.

"Well, old fellow, it is getting late, and I will betake myself to the hotel, leaving you to your dreams of future bliss. After all there is something inexpressibly agreeable in the thought that there is one woman who thinks of you alone, who looks to you only, who is glad when you are glad, and sad when you are sad: who is ready to follow wherever you go, even to and over that line which separates the here from the hereafter. Be sure that I wish and prophesy for you all this and more, for I think you are one of the few men who will strive to make the ideal the real."

And, rising, he held out his hand to Donald with a frank grace and a smile which touched his face with a new aspect, and showed that he could be what is called very lovable, if he chose.

"Good-night, Deering," replied Donald, grasping his hand with equal friendliness. "I am sure of my own feelings and intentions; and I feel that I can safely trust the future."

Left alone, he stood before the fire which the cool October evening had made necessary, and mused—"He offered me a light in more ways than one, and I have refused it." Faintly and from afar off came to him the remembrance of what he had heard his mother read in his boyhood days, "That is the true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world."

CHAPTER X.

KATE MELTON, having grown up in Millville, was known to nearly all its inhabitants; and, as their pastor's daughter, many were proud of her and glad that she was to be married to the young physician who commanded the respect of all. What he had done for old John Wilson was well known, and it had placed him upon a pedestal for many of them.

Murva knew that Harold Deering was to be at the wedding, and as the bridal party entered the room on that morning she knew where he stood, though she did not look up.

As the solemn tones of Mr. Melton's voice fell on her ear, the marriage service seemed to have an impressiveness which roused some of the feeling she had experienced when talking with old John. When the final words, "And what God hath joined together let no man put asunder," had been uttered, she looked up and into Mr. Deering's eyes, which were fixed intently upon her instead of upon the bride and groom: and again she was both drawn and repelled by them.

She felt as if he was studying her; and at the same time she seemed to see beneath his impassive face a slight mockery of what was transpiring. Not mockery exactly, she said to herself, but an attitude as if he were up on some height and looking down upon what was going on, and those concerned therein, with an

expression which said, "This will not last long! You will get up here by-and-bye!"

As the friends pressed forward to offer their congratulations he came also and stood by Murva's side. There was something about him that contrasted with most of those present, to his advantage, and Murva felt this. Beside his easy though impressive manners he manifested what would ordinarily be called the superiority of brains; and, in spite of herself, she found she was giving but a divided attention to Kate and her husband on his account.

At the wedding breakfast he was beside her, and as opportunity offered asked casually, "Do you return home shortly, Miss Kroom, now that our friends are made one and are to leave us for the present?"

"I shall remain with Mr. and Mrs. Melton until their return," she replied. "I am yet undecided as to my plans beyond that time."

He looked at her with a slight surprise visible in his face.

"I understood your settled home was here in Millville; that you resided with your parents," he said.

Murva did not answer. At the moment she did not see what reply it was best to make. He continued to look at her as if he expected one, and she finally said, "My parents do reside here, and my home has always been with them. It is possible, however, that I may go away. One cannot always stay at home, you know, and I am desirous of achieving something for myself."

There was an access of colour in her face, and he felt that there was more in her reply than appeared. The girl interested him. She was different from the majority of young women whom he had met, and he

could not read her as readily as he could most of them. He saw in her none of the little arts by which they attract men; which seem to be as natural to them as breathing. She did not seem to have even a thought of the kind, but rather to shrink from particular notice. She was not beautiful. No! Yet she was something to which he could not give a name.

She was the reverse in nearly every respect to what he would have described the average young woman to be. She gave him the impression of having had an experience beyond her years, but it was not an experience in love. No, that he was sure of. In some indefinable way there seemed a tinge of the vestal about her. She was one who had come a long way, much longer than most girls of her age, and yet was far behind them in matters of the heart. There were two of her as she sat beside him: the outer woman who was looking at what lay before her with steady eyes and serious purpose, and the inner child who wondered what it all meant.

Murva was breathing quickly, and there was a little tremour in her hands. She was realising the difficulties that lay in her way. How could she carry out her purpose and avoid the questioning which would arise with the people among whom she had lived? How answer those among whom she was going? She did not want to say one accusing word of her father and of her home. She wanted simply to go away in peace, free to live her own life in her own way. He noticed her agitation, and turned with a remark to his neighbour on the other side. Murva took a sudden resolution.

"Mr. Deering," she said, "should not a woman have ambition as well as a man?"

"Why, certainly," he replied. "But a woman's

ambition must necessarily be unlike that of a man; and the field in which she can gratify it is much more limited than his. Are you becoming specially ambitious?" And he looked at her very kindly and encouragingly.

"I do not know that," said Murva slowly. "I hardly think I am especially so. But I do want to be free, be myself, and do something for other people."

He looked at her curiously. "Free! Why, is not a young woman of this American people a typical specimen of freedom itself? With no other nation in the world does she have such latitude as with ours."

"But I mean personally," said Murva; "and what I mean is not easy to put into words. I want to be free to go where and when I like, do what I like, and not be obliged to curb and cramp myself to suit other people. Men are free to act in this way, and so can fulfil their ambitions. Why should not women be as free?"

"Because women are women, I suppose," he answered quietly, after a moment. "This very freedom with man makes life a struggle for him. Women are not fitted for struggling with the world. Their natures make them dependent, and they should be taken care of."

Murva made no reply. She did not know why she had said what she did; for she was rarely outspoken even to her friends, much more to comparative strangers. She had followed an impulse, and it had led her—where?

The guests were rising from the table, and Murva had turned to leave the room in order to attend Kate in her preparations for going away, when he said in a low tone, "I shall see you again, as I intend to remain

here for a short time." He had made up his mind to that effect in the last five minutes. "I shall find you with Mr. and Mrs. Melton, shall I not?"

"I shall be with them for the present," Murva replied.

The carriage was at the door which was to take Dr. Crawford and his wife to the depot. With her white robe and veil Kate had laid away girlhood, and in her quiet brown travelling dress was ready to go and meet wifehood.

"I shall find you here when I come back, dear," she said in Murva's ear; and with her arms around her mother and father by turns, she received their parting blessing, and was led from the old home by her husband.

The carriage rolled away, the guests departed one by one, and Murva turned her attention to what had to be done, that the house might again be in order. "Now I am going to be your daughter for a little while, you know," she said, kissing Mrs. Melton affectionately on the cheek; "and I am going to take such good care of everything."

Mr. Melton had gone to his study, and his wife and Murva were discussing what was to be done with this and what with that, when there came a violent ring at the door. The sound struck a sudden chill to Murva's heart, and before the servant could come she had reached the door and opened it. A neighbour stood there, and at the gate was a carriage, while around it was a small crowd.

"There has been an accident," he said quickly, "and Miss Kate and Dr. Crawford have come back."

Murva saw Donald among those at the gate, and that he was lifting someone out of the carriage, giving

directions at the same time to those who stood about him. Her first thought was to run down to him, but hearing Mrs. Melton advancing behind her, she turned to her instead.

"Something has happened, dear Mrs. Melton," she said; but the mother had caught sight of the figures coming up the garden walk and, with a white face, caught at the side of the door to keep from falling.

Donald and another gentleman were bearing Kate's unconscious form to the home she had left but a short half-hour before. Slowly they came up the steps, the closed eyes in the white still face taking no cognisance of the anxious ones looking on.

"Oh, Donald, is she dead?" asked Mrs. Melton, starting forward.

"No, mother!" replied Donald. That this should have been the first time he had called her "Mother"! "She is not dead, but I cannot yet tell how badly she is injured. The horses were frightened and overturned the carriage."—His voice choked for an instant. "We must take her upstairs at once, so that I can see what has to be done for her."

Murva ran hastily up before them while the precious burden was borne after her and laid upon the bed in the room from which she had descended that morning, robed for her bridal. All the joy and gladness had gone out of the house and, instead, there was a weight in the very atmosphere. Bad news travels quickly, and many neighbours and friends were soon there, anxious to know what had happened and what the consequences. Murva, in the intervals of rendering Mrs. Melton and Donald the assistance they required, answered the many questioners and sent them away with promises of further information the next day.

For a greater part of the afternoon Kate remained unconscious, but towards evening she opened her eyes and looked wonderingly about her. "What is the matter, Donald?" she said endeavouring to rise. But instantly her face was convulsed with pain, and her body quivered from head to foot.

"Lie still, my darling," said Donald. "Do not make an effort to move now. When the carriage was overturned you——"

"Were you hurt, Donald?" she interrupted feebly. All her strength was consumed by pain, but her love gave her voice.

"No, my darling. I am sound and whole, and here to care for you as only a husband can."

He knew that she had received serious injury, one which he feared she would never entirely recover from; and his whole heart went out to her in an overwhelming flood of love and compassion. Were what he feared true, he would have to be to her more than any man could be who was not physician as well as husband. And, dimly at first, the future stretched before him in long years of invalidism for Kate, in equally long years of care and watchfulness for him, and bore, as he looked upon it, a very different aspect from what it had in the morning.

He would not allow himself to think of it; all might be well yet. After a few days he could tell her condition better than now; and whatever came, he was her husband—thank God!—with the right to watch over her, and cherish her as the most precious thing on earth to him, even though she were never again the blooming, healthy darling of yesterday. All his manhood was roused and exalted; and he felt himself capable of fulfilling to the utmost all the duties of a

husband and a son to his wife and her parents. Surely Kate's lot would be harder than either of theirs; and from the very depths of his soul there rose the earnest desire, intense in its earnestness, that he might meet and bear well his part in whatever lay before them.

Suddenly Harold Deering's words came to him, "Ideal love has no place in our practical every-day life." Let cold reason reign triumphant for Deering if he was satisfied with it. Within her husband's heart Kate should dwell as within a temple; as within its very holy of holies where nothing which was not of the purest, the highest, should reach her. All that the loftiest love and the most unselfish devotion could bring to her should be hers henceforth.

CHAPTER XI.

"So it is not probable that Mrs. Crawford will ever fully recover from the effects of the accident?"

The speaker was Harold Deering, and he was seated with Murva in Mrs. Melton's parlor. He had come to them immediately on hearing the sad news, and had offered his services freely in any and all ways in which he could be of use. He showed Donald a hearty, manly sympathy and even an affection which touched him and made him turn to the offered friendship with grateful appreciation. He had presented himself at the house unfailingly every day to receive the latest news; and, without seeming officious, manifested an unremitting desire to be helpful.

"Dr. Crawford considers that the indication at present, I believe," answered Murva. "And, oh! is it not hard for both of them? She so young! And so strong and vigorous as she has always been. I cannot be thankful enough that her husband is what he is. So good and so true; so tender of her and of her parents too. I wonder if most men are like him?"

And Murva paused without any consciousness of having stepped upon the toes of an old adage.

"No one who is worthy to be called a man would for a moment shrink from the duty devolving upon him through such an event," he replied. "The time when

a man is most needed, is the time to show what he is made of."

He looked at Murva as he replied, and was struck with some undefinable change in her. She looked and seemed very interesting in some unnameable way.

For she had changed during the time she had been in Mr. Melton's home. Under its warming influences her nature had blossomed somewhat, had opened enough to show that what she had been was not what she was to be. She had lost some of the constraint habitual with her, even in this short time, and having seen Mr. Deering every day for some time she was more approachable than formerly. She did not study him now as she did at first. She took him more as a matter of course, and greatly enjoyed his frequent visits. She even found herself looking forward to them as the event of the day.

"Dr. Crawford was uncommonly fortunate to escape as he did," Mr. Deering continued. "He tells me that, with the exception of a severe wrench, from which he is recovering, he feels no ill effects from the accident."

"Oh, yes, it seems wonderful that he should escape with so little injury when Kate received so much. Mr. Deering, do you think that things just happen?"

"It seems to me that everything that transpires can be traced to natural causes, and there is no need to seek for any beyond them," he replied, an inclination to smile betraying itself in his face. Her abruptness in asking serious questions always amused him.

But Murva did not notice it. She was looking inward again after her old fashion. "There are so many things I want to know!" she said with a sigh.

"And you have many years yet in which to gain the

knowledge," said he, kindly. "Do not try to gain too much now. More experience than you have had is necessary for standing before the sphinx of life and reading its secret. Shall I tell you of some of the people and things I have seen in my wanderings up and down the earth?" he added.

He wanted to draw her away from her serious reflections, and he had begun to enjoy the play of expression on her face. He desired to see more of it. He found it very interesting even to observe her.

"If you please, Mr. Deering," she replied simply.

Harold Deering had the faculty of making what he described visible to his hearers. He carried them with him into scenes before unknown, and made them see the moving life there, almost as vividly as if looking upon it. To a girl like Murva, serious and thoughtful by nature, with an experience which accentuated her natural tendencies and confined her to narrow limitations, there was a special charm in his descriptions and comments. They gave her in some degree a sense of freedom, that which she so longed for. Roaming from place to place as one willed, no one to say, "Come here!" or "You must go there!"—seeing all manner of people and customs, with plenty of time to observe them, master of one's self and subject to no authority, surely this must be delightful. And this is what it is to be a man, she thought to herself and sighed.

The door-bell rang, and a maid entered the room with a note which she delivered to her. Murva felt a sinking within as she took it in her hand, and a complete change passed over her face as she recognised her father's handwriting. He could not help noticing this change though good breeding prevented him from observing her too closely.

After a moment's hesitation, Murva, with an apology opened the note and read it.

"DEAR MURVA:—

"I want you to come home to-morrow morning. I am sick and need you more than do those with whom you are staying.

"YOUR FATHER."

This was all, and eminently characteristic of Nicholas Kroom.

Murva did not speak or move. She felt cold and numb as if she had been struck suddenly, and, at the same time, confronted with the necessity of immediate decision and action. While she had been with the Meltons she had made up her mind to go to New York, thinking that in so large a city she could the more readily find employment. But beyond this decision she had made no plan. The preparations for the wedding had kept her busy, and, since then, the sad sequence, and trouble her friends experienced in consequence, had so occupied her thoughts that she had given her own affairs scarcely any attention.

Now, all at once, immediate action was forced upon her. Donald and his wife and the Meltons did need her. She knew well that they would feel it a deprivation did she leave them now. Kate looked to her for companionship in her husband's absence, and Mr. Melton and his wife had come to depend much upon her. She would not leave them at present to carry out any plans of her own; but ought she to leave them for her father?

No, she said to herself; not unless his need was greater than theirs; and she knew what his illnesses had

always been; never anything serious, and he had ever been more frightened than hurt.

"But he is your father!" something said within her. If she went back home she would have more difficulty than ever in getting away again. She could accomplish it only by walking out of the house in defiance of his express command; accomplish it only through a violent scene, which she wished to avoid if possible. She had enough that was unpleasant to remember and she did not want more. She felt it hard enough to retain respect for her father without having the little she had destroyed through contention with him in maintaining her right.

"But if he is sick and really does need you!" said the inner voice again.

She was roused by Mr. Deering's voice. "Have you had bad news? Can I help you in any way?" he said.

"Yes! No! I——" and she stopped, not knowing what to say.

He looked at her for a moment, then drew his chair to her side. He put out his hand as if to take hers, then drew it back after barely touching it.

"Pardon me if I say, I see you are in trouble," he said; "and believe that I sympathise with you and would gladly be of assistance if it were possible."

It was rather a dangerous thing for a girl whose life had been so restricted as Murva's, and whose imagination had had more than normal room for action in consequence, to have a very interesting man, scarcely ten years older than herself, offer her sympathy and assistance.

The hardly perceptible touch of his hand sent a thrill all through her; roused in her a feeling so entirely new that she was divided between surprise at

herself and gratitude for his sympathy. His very nearness to her made him seem different, in some way, from what he did when he was across the room. She looked up at him and his eyes gazed steadily into her own. Again the feeling she had when she first saw him came over her. It was as if he was not an utter stranger to her; as if she knew him, and yet did not know him; as if there was something in him drawing something in her; and it was both pleasant and painful; something she welcomed and yet shrank from. But that passed in an instant, and she saw only the very kind and earnest attention with which he was regarding her and his near presence seemed very comforting, giving her a sense of security. She wished—did she? Yes, she did! She wished that he would reach his hand again toward hers and take it in his own.

As if her thought were a spoken request which accorded with his own wish he took her hand gently in his saying, "Miss Murva"—it was the first time he had called her by that name. What a new sound it had!—"will you believe me?"

"Oh, yes," she replied, her breath coming and going quickly while he felt a tremour in the hand he held, "and I thank you very much; but this is something which it seems to me I must settle for myself. I want to go away from home, and my father does not wish me to."

He felt that there was more involved than her words gave utterance to, and as she drew her hand away he said, remembering her remarks at the wedding, "And do you have a special object in view which you can carry out only by going away from home?"

"I want to be free," said Murva, almost with a sob.

Seeing that she was deeply agitated, he did not

reply for a moment. "What does she mean, I wonder?" he thought to himself. "What can her idea of freedom be? She does not look or seem like an incipient woman's rights agitator, and the only child of a well-to-do man cannot be so insufficiently provided for as to compel her to make her own way."

Murva strove hard to master her agitation, and succeeded sufficiently to say more composedly:

"What I have said must seem very strange to you, Mr. Deering; but I can hardly explain the circumstances which have given me the desire I have expressed, without disloyalty to those who have a right to expect more of me. I have reached a point in my life where I must make a momentous decision—one upon which my future depends. My inclinations lie in one direction, and my duty—I begin to fear—in another. I thought I had made this decision, waiting only the opportunity to carry it out, and that my duty accorded with my inclinations. But in the last few minutes a different view seems to be forcing itself upon me, and it is most unwelcome."

Her voice trembled again, for, as she said, this call of her father's had brought to the surface an inquiry which, with all her arrived-at conclusions, had never been satisfactorily answered. Was she acting contrary to her duty in leaving her father's house? Was she thinking only of herself, of what she desired, regardless of all rights of his? Did her reaching legal age free her from the relation of a child to a parent? With all her instinctive recognition of the unlawfulness of his despotism, there was something else which had grown steadily within her since her visits to John Wilson, for it had been watered both by his example and his words. It was a recognition of stern duty and the

beauty of unselfishness; and now this would he heard; it raised its voice and demanded an answer.

He waited for her quietly, making her feel by his manner that he was fully in sympathy with her, and could understand all she meant to convey.

"I think I shall—go home—to-morrow," she said finally.

He saw, now, that she did not wish to go home, and understood that there must be reasons why it was distasteful to her and which, probably, made her express that wish for freedom which had seemed so strange to him. His interest in her was increased. He felt a man's generous impulse to protect and help a woman who needed it.

"Did you not intend to return home?" he asked gently.

"No," replied Murva. "I intended to go to New York and find some employment by which I could maintain myself."

"Have you ever been in New York or in any large city?"

"No," answered Murva, shaking her head.

"Have you friends there who would take care of you till you found what you desired?"

"No, none!"

"I fear, then, that you would find your experience in such a place as New York, where everything would be new to you, far different from what you expect. You would not find it easy, as a stranger and without influence, to find employment befitting a lady. I would strongly advise you to remain here where your home is, and where you have friends beside, unless it is absolutely impossible."

Murva listened in silence. Perhaps she had not

realised sufficiently the difficulties in the way farther along, because the ones in the present seemed the greatest.

"Mr. Deering, could not you help me to find employment in New York if I should decide to go there later on?"

And she looked at him as innocently and appealingly as a child, putting her hands together in an unuttered, "Please do."

He saw that she had no conception of the view which would be taken of a young woman protected by a young unmarried man, without other friends, and seeking to establish herself among respectable people. It was the difference between a worldly education and the natural instinct of a naturally pure woman.

"I would gladly use what influence I possess in your behalf," he answered gently. "But my interest in you constrains me to urge upon you the advisability of remaining here where you are known. If you intend to return home to-morrow, you will take no immediate action in regard to going away, will you?"

"No," answered Murva, "not at once. But I think I shall be compelled to go some time."

"Well, 'Sufficient unto the day,' etc., you know, Miss Murva," he replied brightly. "You will allow me to visit you in your own home, will you not? I shall remain here for a time."

Before replying, Murva rapidly reviewed the situation. If he visited at her father's house, he would be repelled by much he saw there. Her father would take offence at him, sooner or later, as he did with everyone. But she wanted to see him again. Oh, she did!

"I shall be glad to see you if you are disposed to come," she answered.

"Thank you. And now, the address?"

She gave it to him, while he wrote it in a memorandum book. "And now, good-night! I must not detain you, for you will have preparations to make for your return to-morrow."

He walked to the door, turning as he reached it for a final "Good-night." Murva was standing before the fire looking after him, and his gaze met hers. Again she felt that subtle sensation, sweet yet with a tinge of pain in it.

Without removing his eyes from hers he recrossed the room, and, stopping in front of her, held out his hand without a word. She placed hers in it without hesitation. Bending over it he kissed it gently and left the room.

CHAPTER XII.

MURVA'S heart was heavy as she entered her father's door the next day. Kate had been loath to let her go, and Mr. and Mrs. Melton had assured her that their house was her home whenever she chose to consider it so, though the good pastor, as in duty bound, charged her to think well of what she owed her father as well as herself. Yet she brought something with her which she did not take away. There was a new feeling and hope stirring within her, something which made her present situation more bearable than it would otherwise have been.

Her father was impatiently expecting her. His slight illness had been caused by his anxiety purely. He had not had an easy moment since Murva went away. He could not accept the possibility that she would leave him now that she was of age, as his wife had intimated, only to bring upon herself more of that harshness to which she had become seasoned. He could not even admit that his daughter had any more right to act independent of him than formerly; and so the fact that it was possible, if she chose to do so, only irritated and worried him till he was ill with protracted suspense.

So he sent the note Murva had received, unknown to his wife, who had advised him to let the girl alone as often as she had felt it safe to do so. Have her he

would and must, if he had to go and fetch her. Nicholas Kroom's authority was something not to be set aside.

As Murva entered the room, her stepmother's stare of astonishment and "Why! have you come back?" showed her that she, at least, did not expect her.

"Of course she has come back! What is the matter with you?" exclaimed Mr. Kroom impatiently.

"Yes, father, I have come back," said Murva, quietly.

"Well! I'm beat!" declared Mrs. Kroom under her breath. And Murva knew from her looks that the old warfare on her part would continue.

Now that Murva was really once more at home, her father, relieved of fear on that point, could be true to himself and talk to her as the child who was accountable to him.

"Why have you stayed away so long?" he demanded. "I think you have been very neglectful of your duty. I gave you permission to remain till after the wedding, and you have been there much longer."

Murva felt the impulse to turn and walk back to where she had come from. Had she not come home in obedience to her sense of duty? But, after a moment's struggle with herself, she answered gently:

"Our friends were in great trouble, and I could do no less than remain with them while they seemed to need me. They do so now, but I have come home because you said you needed me."

"I don't think your father needs any better care'n he's got!" flashed out Mrs. Kroom suddenly.

"Will you be quiet?" returned Mr. Kroom menacingly. "I'm talking to Murva, not you." And, turning to her, he continued, "I should think your father

came before anybody else. However, we won't say anything more about it, now that you have come home. There's some work I need done just as soon as you can get it ready."

Murva had laid off her walking things. She came and stood before her father, looking him steadily in the eye as she said, "Father, do you entirely forget that I am a child no longer?"

Mr. Kroom did not like the firmness which he was compelled to recognise under her gentleness.

"Why! what do you mean? You are my child, are you not?" he replied.

"I am your child, but I am also a woman," Murva replied with dignity, "and I am compelled to remind you of the fact. I am disposed to remember the one but equally disposed not to forget the other; and I beg, father, that you will not forget it either." And taking up her things she left the room.

Mrs. Kroom looked at her husband with a certain satisfaction that he had been so cleverly sat upon, as she would have expressed it. He saw it, and exclaimed furiously, "Go away and attend to your work, will you? When I want you I will call you."

"Perhaps you'll call some time and not get answered," she muttered to herself as she went to the kitchen.

Whether he would or not he was compelled to reflect on what Murva had said, and her manner convinced him that she meant it, that she meant his treatment of her to be on a new basis. He felt the wisdom of a little less of the old authority, Murva's twenty-one years standing out vividly before him; and her new attitude, her daring to speak as she had done, contrasted as vividly with her old manner.

Murva found, and was devoutly thankful for it, that there was a shade less of authority in her father's tone and manner during the next few days. She had made up her mind to continue to live at home, for a time at least, if it were possible without a sacrifice of her self-respect, and that she would compel recognition of her proper position meanwhile. She had gained in courage, in the power of righteous self-assertion during her absence. Both her father and her stepmother felt the change in her.

But a few days after her return home, the evening found Mr. Harold Deering at the door of Mr. Kroom's house. He had experienced in these few days a degree of impatience which was new to him. He wanted to see Murva very much, and he did not want to wait to see her either. Her face came before him constantly, and why? he asked himself. It was not a beautiful face and yet in some indefinable way he had a sense of beauty as he watched it. It was something below the surface which eluded him when he tried to name it. He had met many attractive women, and she was like none of them. She seemed to stand alone as the only specimen of her kind. He had heard her friend Kate rally her on being called "a peculiar girl," and he could see that she might be so considered, yet not for a moment unpleasantly peculiar; on the contrary, charmingly so, to him at least.

He had come as soon as he felt that no undue haste would be manifested. Murva's pleasure at seeing him again showed itself plainly. Her face was transparent, that was its charm, he thought to himself as she introduced him to her father.

Mr. Kroom was ponderously courteous and friendly, and finding that Mr. Deering was only a temporary

sojourner in Millville he, at great length, explained its advantages and characteristics. Murva took but little part in the conversation, partly because her father monopolised it, and partly because she was quite content to sit and listen. She was experiencing a new and a keen pleasure. Even life at home was far more bearable, and the prospective employment in New York and consequent independence not quite so attractive.

Mr. Deering appealed to her frequently, and noticed that her father would interrupt her without the least apology if he wished to say anything upon the subject in hand; also that Murva accepted this as a matter of course.

Finally, when Mrs. Kroom entered the room with an all-ready-to-be-introduced air, and such a manifest appearance of having "smartened up" for the occasion; and when Murva introduced her as "Mrs. Kroom" instead of "my mother," he began to see the reason why she had expressed the wish to make a home for herself in another place.

A discussion arose as to an occurrence mentioned in the daily paper. Mr. Deering quoted it as he had read it and Mr. Kroom promptly contradicted him. Harold was too well-bred to insist upon the correctness of his quotation and attempted to pass on and leave the point; but this Mr. Kroom would not allow. Mr. Deering must acknowledge that he was right. To this end he would read the article in question; but his spectacles were not at hand and so, every naturally—"Murva, go and get my glasses!" he said.

The command pure and simple, in place of a request, and the abruptness of it, astonished Harold Deering. Murva left the room at once without a word and returned with the desired article. Her cheeks were

flushed as she gave them to her father, who received them without a "Thank you."

"Now, Mr. Deering, you will see that I am right," declared Mr. Kroom triumphantly as he prepared to read.

"I am quite ready to admit all you wish, now, Mr. Kroom," replied Harold briefly.

Murva knew that he was repelled by the egotism and lack of consideration for others on her father's part: and a feeling of shame possessed her for the moment, that he should see what he did and draw the conclusions from it which were obvious. But she thought to herself, "It is no worse to have it known than to have it so," and submitted as resignedly as she could.

Mr. Kroom's voice halted suddenly as he was reading the article under discussion. He hesitated, went on again for a word or two, and then laid the paper down, taking off his spectacles and rubbing them as if he could not see clearly. But he had read enough for them to see that Mr. Deering was right in his quotation.

Harold was generous enough not to call attention to the fact, but started another subject of conversation, and with Murva. She felt grateful to him for his forbearance, and during the remainder of the evening Mr. Kroom did not interrupt as much as formerly. As he rose to take leave he turned to her and said, "Will you drive with me to-morrow afternoon at three, Miss Kroom? The weather is delightful now, and I find your pretty town affords some charming views."

Murva, involuntarily, for the force of old habit had not spent itself, turned toward her father. Formerly she would have referred the matter to him for his permission; but she checked herself in time to say, without looking at him, "Thank you, Mr. Deering. I will

go with pleasure. The weather is, as you say, delightful, and I shall enjoy driving."

As the door closed behind Mr. Deering, Nicholas Kroom dropped in his chair as if he felt the need of support. What did his daughter mean by promising to go away before finding out if he needed her? What if he should want her to do some work? Mr. Deering was a gentleman—that was evident. But she ought to consider what was due her father.

Murva, very wisely, said good-night at the door, and instead of coming into the room and giving her father an opportunity of speaking to her, went upstairs at once to her own room. Mr. Deering had said nothing, but his lingering hand-pressure and look in the hall had told her much and she was comforted.

As Harold Deering walked back to his hotel, his musings were both reflective and speculative. "A clear case of the domestic tyrant and of the extreme type? An uncongenial stepmother of an inferior order of women. Truly, a combination that a young woman of refined nature and sensibilities would want to get away from. Poor child! What a time she must have had of it! It is the life she has lived which has given her the constrained air I noticed when I first met her, and there were traces of it this evening. That speaking face of hers does not light up in her own home as it did when she was with the Meltons. What an egregious idiot her father is! And if I am not mistaken her stepmother is meanly jealous of her, so that she has that to contend with into the bargain. No wonder she wants to be free, to strike out for herself! But how little she can know of what that means. Women need protectors. They are not fit to battle with the world. It makes them hard and aggressive, gives them a mas-

culine cast, the best of them; and a woman loses all her charm when she gets that. Deliver me from a smart woman! Such a none is not fit for a wife, and wifehood is woman's only legitimate office. I wonder——"

He stopped suddenly. "Is there any danger to my peace of mind in staying here? Pshaw! a rational man always has command of himself. I'll let things work awhile longer."

CHAPTER XIII.

PROMPTLY the next afternoon, Mr. Harold Deering was at Murva's door with the best horses and carriage Millville's chief livery could produce.

She was very happy this afternoon. There was a bounding gladness within her as they drove away, which all her stepmother's sour looks and innuendoes had been powerless to affect. She had expected that her father would raise objections to her newly-exercised liberty of action; but he had said nothing, though showing a certain uneasiness of manner. Her resolve and the carrying it into execution so far, was, in itself, a tonic for her hitherto repressed nature; add to that a presence and companionship which she was learning to long for, and no wonder that Mr. Deering said to himself, "I thought she was not beautiful, but she is —almost." It was no effort for Murva to talk this afternoon. A very wellspring was bubbling within her, and overflowed from her lips. Was there ever so delicious an afternoon! She had lived in Millville all her life, but never had she seen such a glorious fall! Such a wealth of colouring, such a warm, mellow atmosphere! The very sunlight was soft instead of brilliant. Did not Mr. Deering think it delightful?

Of course he did! Specially delightful! Was she one of the declared lovers of nature?

"I have found outdoor wanderings very soothing and comforting," answered Murva. "Nature's silent harmony has always appealed to me. But it is a puzzle to me as well. What does it all mean?"

"I am sure I don't know!" he answered laughingly. "I am not disposed to be in the least analytical this afternoon. I am quite content to enjoy."

She answered him in the same strain, and gradually they grew more serious and confidential. He told her something of his early life, his faint remembrance of his mother, the care he had received from his father, his college life and his father's death later, the feeling of having no anchor, which had led him to wander from one place to another according to his mood. She listened to it all so willingly; saw him as a boy and youth with very tender eyes and yearning sympathy; followed him in his journeys with an unflagging interest. When he spoke of his uncertain future she looked at him with such intensity in her face and eyes, such conviction in her voice, as she said, "Oh, but, Mr. Deering, do you not see that your very freedom from near ties enables you to be and do just what you choose to be and to do? What an opportunity you have!"

"But, Miss Murva, I do not know that I have any special ambition to gratify. I thought at one time that the political field was a desirable one for a man to try his powers in, but the little insight I gained into the political machinery and the way it was operated for coveted results, disgusted me. I like to choose my associates, not have them forced upon me; and active political work necessitates good-fellowship with men whom, otherwise, you would not allow to cross your threshold. Ours is a great and glorious government—

in principle. As an actuality the roads which lead to its chief offices are so filthy that something must unavoidably stick to those who wade through them: and these are too often the men who are most amenable to individual or corporate interests instead of the universal interest. A government of the people, by the people, for the people, is the grandest conceivable; but ours is really the government of the unthinking many by the unscrupulous few."

"Is there not more need, then, for men who are above this level to enter the field and endeavour to make the actualisation of our government accord with its principles?" asked Murva.

"Theoretically, yes! But the attempt to do so would be useless, and for a reason which has its basis in human nature. Self-interest is the natural and guiding impulse of every human being. It operates inevitably wherever there is room for it, and nowhere is this fact more conspicuous than in the political arena. Every representative in our halls of congress has his constituency back of him. He represents it as a body theoretically, but practically he stands for those in it who have the most influence, who can command the most votes. And these, in their turn, have their constituencies who are led after them with halters round their necks, some through their ignorance of the duties of citizenship, others through their disregard of them, and all because they have some individual interest of their own which they want maintained and satisfied. The cry 'Purify politics!' is frequently heard, but that purification which is the maintenance of the interests of the people as a whole against corporate interests, even if this conflicts with self-interest, will never come, except through the purification of human nature first."

"Nevertheless, if I were a man I think I would see what one man could do," said Murva reflectively.

He laughed. "Well, as you are a woman you are not likely to have the opportunity, or even an introduction to politics. Be thankful that you are a woman, and that you will be shielded from such experiences, because they are entirely beyond your province."

They had driven some little distance into the country and a little in advance of them was a rock not far from the roadside, nearly breast high.

"Oh, I remember this place," said Murva suddenly. "It was one afternoon this summer when a picnic party was in that grove to the left, and I wandered here in one of my moods when I like to be alone. I stood by that rock for some time, wondering how it came there, for you see the country about here is remarkably free from rocks. As I leaned against it I seemed to draw comfort and support from it, it was so firm and immovable. I was 'blue' I suppose, as everybody is at times"—she did not want him to think that she was casting any reflections upon her home-life—"and I felt so cheered by the silent example of the rock, standing so steadfast, though alone. It was the same in fair weather or storm, meeting the sunlight or the tempest equally, welcoming the one and accepting the other, stirring not an inch from its place for either, sufficient unto itself under all conditions. I went back to my friends comforted through the very rebuke I had received. Mr. Deering, I have a fancy for standing for a moment by that rock again. May I?"

"Most certainly!" said he, checking the horses at once, and springing to the ground he assisted her to alight. She walked to and leaned against it, throwing

one arm caressingly over its top. It seemed like an old friend, one that she was glad to see, yet did not at the moment need as she had formerly. He watched her as she stood there, with admiring eyes. Whatever might be the difference of opinion as to Murva's face, there could be none regarding her form. It was very supple and graceful. She never made an awkward movement or fell into such a position. While he hardly understood the nature that could draw strength and consolation from such sources, had no prompting toward such for himself, he felt a tender sympathy for the girl whose experiences had driven her to them; and he began to feel that he could offer her something much better in their place.

Murva stood there but for a moment, and then came forward to resume her seat in the carriage, with a deprecating recognition of his kindness in humouring her whim and not laughing at her for it.

"I wish it were in my power to do more for you than that," he said, as he helped her to her seat and took his own beside her.

As he gathered up the reins and turned to retrace their way a locomotive whistled at a distance, breaking the silence suddenly, and startling the horses, which plunged forward. Had not Harold Deering been a capital reinsman the carriage would have been overturned. As it was, they barely escaped this catastrophe, and it was a moment or two before he could bring the horses to their normal gait.

Murva had made no sound. She was not of the shrieking kind. She was a "peculiar girl." Neither had she seized the lines or hindered him in the least in his efforts to control the animals. But when he had succeeded and turned to look at her, her face was very

white, her lips were tightly set, and her hands were clinched in her lap. Taking the reins in one hand he laid the other on hers and said, very, very gently, "You are not afraid when you are with me, are you?" and there was slight emphasis on the "me" which made her face change and her hands loosen their tight hold of each other, while her whole form relaxed and swayed toward him.

She looked in his face and, "I will not be any more," she answered simply. The tears were not far from her eyes, but she rallied and began to excuse herself.

"I was never afraid of horses or accidents in my life; but since Kate was injured I must confess I am quite nervous, and more expectant of disastrous occurrences. It is foolish, for one makes suffering for one's self in this way, when there is no cause for it. I must endeavour to overcome the tendency before it becomes a habit." And she smiled, with lips that were yet a little tremulous, but with a new emotion.

He took his hand from hers—he had held it there all the while she had been speaking—and said, "I believe that you will accomplish whatever task you set yourself, however difficult it may be."

His manner and tone put her at ease again. She was quite content to remain silent for a while. She felt a security, had a sense of protection, that was unspeakably delightful to her. Little was said by either on the way back, except through that conversation which has no need of words.

They travelled toward the west and a beautiful sunset was directly before them. Red clouds, from a pale rose to a glowing crimson in hue, tinged at the edges with purple, were the gorgeous robes, fringe-bordered, of the attendants of his majesty, the sun. Low they

bowed before him, as he slowly and with royal dignity sank out of sight. The birds called to each other that he would surely come again, the leaves rustled the same comforting assurance, the night and the day clasped hands, and the stars came out to seal their union.

CHAPTER XIV.

"Now then, look this thing squarely in the face, Harold Deering, and make up your mind what you are going to do!"

Such would have been that gentleman's utterance had he given audible expression to his thoughts. This evening, alone in his room, he resolved to have it out with himself, as he phrased it. He was compelled to acknowledge that he was getting too deeply interested in Murva Kroom for his own peace of mind, and he was quite sure that the interest was, in some degree, reciprocal. He knew there had been a great change in her since he first saw her, and he did not deem it egotistical to think that he had something to do with it. He had no idea when he met her first at the Meltons, that she would be sufficient attraction to keep him in the little town: but so it had proved. He might as well admit it; and now what was likely to come of it?

As he said to Dr. Crawford, he was not ready to marry yet; did not want to be compelled to confine himself to one place and set up his household gods. He wished to do this sometime of course; that was the right and proper thing to do; he must have a wife like his fathers before him; but he did not feel ready to ask any woman to occupy that position. Yet it would be very easy to ask Murva Kroom! She certainly had touched him as no other woman ever had. She had,

silently and unknown to him, crept into some inner chamber of his being, and came forth from thence, at all hours, to confront him with her sweet serious face and glorious, blue-grey eyes.

What a light they had in them at times, especially when she seemed to be rapt and absorbed in something afar off which only she saw! And how soft and melting they could be too! What a depth of feeling he had seen in them, and how directly and fearlessly they looked into his! When he was with her he desired more and more to hold these eyes with his own and read very sweet possibilities in them; desired more and more her nearer presence, if it were only the touch of her hand. He knew he was fast getting to the point where he would not be content with that; and was it fair to her to remain there and meet her constantly?

He walked impatiently up and down the floor. He could not have believed himself to be so attracted by a woman as to feel that he wanted her, whatever she was. Wanted her, without knowing or caring whether she would supply what he had considered the necessities for a happy, because a rational, marriage, or not. And he did not like it. He had too much respect for Harold Deering's views to accept the situation quietly. He chafed under it, and argued matters *pro* and *con;* and as a supplement to every argument that soulful face with its luminous eyes rose up and demanded, "What answer have you to make to me?"

"I want you!" was the answer of his heart.

"No, you do not!" was the answer of his head.

And all the impatient pacing of his apartment could not make the two agree.

Yet he wanted Murva Kroom more and more, the longer he argued the matter. What did it mean?

Could it be possible that he was going to allow himself to be ruled by a feeling that was very suspiciously like the sentiment he had always laughed at as regulating marriage? Well—not much! He was old enough to know better. And he was not going to do anything in a hurry which he might repent of when he had the leisure of the rest of his lifetime to think of it in.

He came to a sudden decision, stopping his rapid perambulations midway in the room, and saying aloud, "I will go to New York to-morrow!" He seated himself at the table with writing materials before him and began,

"My dear Miss Kroom,"

He stopped. What should he say? No answer. Was it necessary to say anything? Had he, in his interviews with her, said or done aught which would make his going away without saying more, dishonourable? No, he had not. He had shown that he took great interest in her; but so far the way was open for him to act as he thought best. If he remained longer and met her more it might, and probably would, be different. Decidedly it was wisest to go away, and it was not even necessary to write his farewell. He would make a parting call at the Meltons' in the morning. He would leave a good-bye message for her with them, and noon should find him on his way to New York.

His mind made up at last, he found on looking at his watch that he had spent the whole evening in arriving at his decision. He went to bed, and when he slept he dreamed a dream.

He was wandering about up and down in the world, seeking something, he knew not what. Everywhere he went all the pleasures and delights known to men

were his in abundance. He had them all, and yet he was not satisfied. Surrounded by noble men and beautiful women, he was yet alone. While they were happy, enjoying all that offered with never a sigh or look of care, he was sad. And he could not tell what he was seeking and never found. There seemed to be nothing in all the world which was not his already. Yet still he wandered restless everywhere, satisfied nowhere, striving ever to find a name for that which he sought, that he might know where to look for it. He questioned others.

"What is it that you seek?" they asked him.

"I do not know," he could only reply.

"You have all there is," said they.

"There is something I miss," said he.

"But you have been through the world," said they.

"And I find it not," said he.

"There is no more than what you have seen," said they.

Then he was sadder still, and he wept, covering his face with his hands.

While he wept a gentle voice said, "Behold me!" And he looked, and a woman stood before him; and there was naught else.

All had vanished. There was no world, no people, neither sun, moon nor stars: nothing but space. And he stood upon and in it; and she stood upon and in it, and they two were all there was.

And he threw his arms around her and drew her to him. Drew her till she was so close that her beautiful body lay against his own from head to foot. Drew and held her till he could feel her heart beating in time with his; her blood as if it were running in his veins and his in hers; her breath with his breath as one, for they

breathed together; her warm flesh as his own, his very own, and quivering and pulsating with the vivid life which coursed through them both.

And he looked in her face, and it was the face of Murva Kroom. He looked in her eyes, and he saw himself there. And he laid his lips upon hers, and strained her the closer to him, and drank up her life into his own.

And as he drank he bent her backward, lower and lower; and he felt a fierce delight, for they two were all there was, naught else but space, and he was master.

But as he looked in her eyes he saw his image fade away, and she began to struggle in his arms. And he held her the closer, and then the tears came and washed where it had been.

And she cried aloud in pain. And he said, "Hush!" And he held her so close that she could not cry. He loved her so much that her cry gave him pain; so he could not let her cry.

And when she had ceased to struggle, he loosed his hold and raised her up, so that he could look in her eyes to find his image again; and she was dead.

Then he was sad. And she vanished, and he was alone. And he wept again. And while he wept a voice said, "Come!"

And he looked, and there was a mountain and he stood at its foot. And it was high and steep; and where he stood there were rocks and poisonous vines and serpents thrusting their heads from behind them. And there were holes in the ground, and there rose horrible cries from out them. And he was afraid, and he wanted to go back, but he could not turn. He looked to the right and to the left and there was no way round.

And the voice said again, "Come!" And he looked

up; and beyond and above the rocks, the vines, the serpents, and the holes in the ground, was her face. Only her face with its starry eyes and rose-petalled lips; and they said, "Come!"

And he wanted to go up the mountain, but he was afraid of the serpents and the poisonous vines and the holes in the ground. And her voice said again, "Come!" And he started forward. And the vines tripped his foot and he fell.

But as he fell, his hand caught a serpent and strangled it. And he threw it from him and laid hold of a rock and rose to his feet and went on again. And he came to a hole in the ground. And the cries deafened him, and the fumes which rose from it stifled him. And he would have turned to go back, and again her voice called, "Come!"

And he gathered himself together, and took a mighty leap. And he was on the other side, and under his feet was another serpent, crushed.

And he went on, and the ground grew clearer. But before him and above him were many trees. There was no path through them; and they were so close together he could see no way. It was dark, he could see no light. And her voice said again, "Come!"

And he looked that way, and there was the face among the trees, and from its eyes came light. And he rushed forward toward it, and struck against a tree and bruised himself. But the face was still there, and the light from the eyes streamed out to where he stood and showed him a path through the trees.

And he walked slowly that way. And he went farther and farther into the wood. And always the face was before him and above him. And always the light from its eyes showed him the way. And he tried to get near

enough to touch it, and always it was as far off, and always the voice said, "Come!"

And he was tired, and he sank on the ground. And the voice said, "See how far you have come!"

And he looked and saw the rocks, the poisonous vines, the serpents, and the holes in the ground, far below him.

And he looked again, and he could see the top of the mountain far above him.

And he looked again, and a hand was held out to him.

And he grasped it, and rose to his feet. But when he tried to retain the hand it was gone. And the voice said again, "Come!"

And again he saw the face, and it was nearer. And the eyes still sent forth their light, and now the lips smiled. And he smiled and held out his arms and pressed forward. And he awoke.

He had overslept himself, and he hastened to make his preparations for departure. The noon train for New York carried him away from Millville; and as he went, he felt something within him drawing and drawing, straining more and more as the revolving wheels carried him farther and farther away.

CHAPTER XV.

IT was the day before Christmas, but in Nicholas Kroom's house were none of the preparations for that one evening and day of the whole year when one's heart grows young and mellow, when one forgets that he has enemies, and when the disposition to share our joys with others rather than our sorrows, prevails.

"Spending money for things to give away just because it is Christmas!" was a weakness unknown to him; and the bundle-laden fathers and mothers received but a short reply to their cheery "Merry Christmas, Mr. Kroom!" as they passed him on the street.

Murva performed her daily morning tasks as usual; but there was no spring in her step or light in her face. She had changed much in the weeks following Harold Deering's departure. Even her stepmother restrained the words on her lips sometimes, when she looked at the girl; and Murva kept more and more within her own room, feeling the companionship of solitude to afford the most compensation; for then she did not have to hide anything or converse when she was all but dumb.

She had been *so* happy the day after her drive with Harold Deering! She remembered how she had been singing as she came downstairs the next morning, and how her father looked at her in surprise as she entered the room. She had felt so comforted; so buoyant and

secure. She did not know why she felt so, could not have told why had she been asked the question; and she did not ask it of herself; had no disposition to do so. She was happy, that was enough.

But in the afternoon she had been to visit Kate; and then she knew. Ah, yes! she knew then.

Kate told her of Mr. Deering's departure, and gave her the message left in their care. Murva did not even now remember how she came home that day. She knew that she walked and walked, and seemed to find herself at her father's gate in the evening without knowing how she got there. When she heard that he was gone she almost stopped breathing, it was such a shock to her; and when Kate went on to tell her that Mr. Deering thought he might be off again for Europe shortly, it seemed as if the ground gave away beneath her and she went down and down to where she was unable to find her way up again.

Not till she had reached home, not till she was safe in her own room for the night, did she begin to feel—begin to recover from the shock sufficiently to feel. And then! Oh, then the humiliation, the pain, the shame for herself when she found herself obliged to confess what she felt; for she knew then why she had been so happy, why everything looked so beautiful to her, and why the tyranny she had lived under was more bearable.

It was he who had made the difference to her. He! This stranger whom she had known but a few weeks! And in these few weeks she could grow to feel that the very sun was put out when he disappeared?

Oh, it could not be! She could not be weak enough to care so much for one who was almost a stranger to her! But was he a stranger? She had never felt that he

was. There was something in her which had gone forth to him from the first time she saw him. And yet that first time was only a little while ago.

Oh, had she not suffered enough? Had not her whole life been one long pain? And why should this be added to it?

Oh, that little glimpse of heaven! That little time when a new world opened before her with the promise of that love and freedom she so longed for! She could not live longer without it! Could not! Would not! It was her right, for it was the right of everyone in the world! Did she not see others enjoying these all around her? Why should she be shut out from them?

Oh, it was too hard, too hard! And she had wept and wept, had thrown herself upon the floor—not even the comfort of her bed would she have—and had felt that the boards beneath her were not as hard and unyielding as was life. To be alone, always alone! Must that be her fate? Was there not one heart in the wide world that would love her? Love her before all?

But after a time she knew that her life must be lived, whatever it was to be, and that she must face all it contained. The underlying strength of her nature began to come to her aid when the first violence of her feelings had abated; and she knew that, whatever else was denied her, duty was her right-hand companion.

That night's battle was not the only one Murva had to fight. Her father's tyranny and her stepmother's jealousy seemed more unbearable than ever; and from week to week she lived on, getting through them as best she could, but growing nearer and nearer to the decision to leave home, cost what it would.

She would not go to New York, oh, no! But she

wanted to go away where she would know no one, and where no one knew her; and there she would try to help others to be happy; if she could not be so herself. Go for a time at any rate, till she could gain, in new surroundings a mastery of herself that would enable her to come back to her father, if that seemed her duty, and bear the life at home with less chafing under it.

He had asked her about Mr. Deering once or twice; who he was, and where he came from, and she had told him briefly the little she knew. But she never mentioned him except in reply to others; and constantly schooled herself to forgetting him and to the forgetting of herself.

And now in the afternoon of this day before Christmas she was going to see the children of a farmer's family and carry such few trifles as she had been able to get for their stockings, which were to be hung in the chimney-place over night. She had another reason for going also. The farmer's house was not far from the rock where she had stopped during her drive with Mr. Deering. She wanted to go to it again, for it seemed like an old friend. She felt as if she could gain strength and courage, as she had before, if she could let it teach her its silent lesson.

And so when the lumbering wagon in which Mr. Jones brought his vegetables to market drove up to the door, she clambered up beside him, telling her stepmother that she would be at home again some time in the evening.

The hearty welcome she received from Mrs. Jones and the children was refreshing, for every particle of affection which was shown her, from whatever source, were it only a stray dog in the street, was dear to her

as bread to a starving man. She romped with them and chatted with their mother for an hour or two, then ran away from them with a laughing remark that she was going to consult with Santa Claus as to what he should put in their stockings that night; and took her way down the road to where the rock stood.

There it was, all alone like herself, standing where it had been all the while, unmoved by what had transpired round it! She had no trouble in reaching it, back as it was from the road, for it was an open winter and the little snow upon the ground was no impediment.

She stood before it, the remembrance of the last time she had been there surging over her and bringing the tears to her eyes. Oh, how weak and foolish she was? Why could she not learn better the lesson this silent friend endeavoured to teach her, and stand unmoved by all the trials and disappointments which life seemed to hold for her in far greater proportion than it held joys?

Why could she not stand by herself, independent of all about her, drawing upon the resources within the depths of her own nature for all she needed, instead of reaching out to others? How much grander and nobler one would be who could do this! Who could meet whatever life offered, unmoved either by its pleasures or its pains, living from the within and affording encouragement and support to all who came that way! Who could give the help of example, the actual living presence and embodiment of a lofty ideal, making that actual instead of visionary!

She brushed away the light snow which had fallen upon the rock, and throwing her arms over it, tried to realise its passive strength, the strength of endurance, for herself. She could see such high possibilities!

Could see a possible life beside which all the gratification of one's desires and the happiness consequent upon it was as nothing; a mere bubble floating in the sunshine, which a chance breath would destroy. But could she make this her own? Could she strive unceasingly and yet endure as the rock?

She passed her hands caressingly over it and laid her cheek against it. O, it was so cold, so hard, so unyielding! She could not be like the rock yet! She could not give up the sweet dreams which she had fed upon, the longings which she had in common with all young womanhood and putting them away from her as the impossible and even the undesirable, because below a high ideal, accept for herself the hard and cold endurance of the rock.

She walked around to the other side of it in her restlessness, noticing that nothing grew up around it, and picturing to herself how it would look if climbing vines were over it. But then it would not be true to its character, she said to herself. It would not then be alone!

As she stood looking at its farther side she started suddenly and went nearer to it, stooping to look more intently at it.

Yes, she was not mistaken! On that side, the farthest from the road, there were some lines or slight indentures in the rock; the most prominent of which were two that made the form of the cross. A cross made by nature herself in the solid rock.

Oh, indeed she had not come to this silent witness in vain! She had come to learn the lesson of the cross, that lesson of all lessons for mankind! And it was to be taught her in God's temple instead of man's!

What did it mean? Jesus upon the cross had been

vividly pictured to her from childhood up. The bleeding, dying Saviour of men had been portrayed as claiming all her love and allegiance, these due him for his marvellous willingness to suffer and to die that she might be saved. But while this portrayal had touched her, had roused her emotions, it had not satisfied her reason; and she had been told that this must be put one side as having no right to satisfaction. She had been told that only by believing in this bleeding, dying Jesus, bleeding and dying for her, could she ever stand at last as one of the accepted of the Father and hear the sentence, "Depart from me, ye cursed!" pronounced upon those on the left hand.

But as she stood and pondered the lesson with her eyes fixed upon the true cross, true because given as part of that object lesson which the world as a whole is, a new meaning seemed to dawn upon her.

The cross was not something belonging to the remote past only, but to the to-day; and the experience of every human being would bring him, sooner or later, face to face with it. For that example offered by the Nazarene so many years ago, was what had to be recognised and followed, not he.

"He that denieth not himself, and taketh up his cross and followeth after me, is not worthy of me." Ah! what a meaning burst upon her now as she recalled those words that she had heard over and over again for years!

The cross of self-denial willingly taken up and carried to life's end! The example of that complete self-abnegation which would minister to others at the sacrifice of self! The living witness to the possibility in the world of obedience to the commandment, "Love thy neighbour as thyself."

And such an one was alone. He had no place to lay his head. The joys and satisfactions common to all were not for him. He was in them but not of them. Theirs the wedding feast, the song, the laughter, the prosperity, the happiness; His, the Gethsemane and Mount Calvary.

Away from those and to these would the bearing of the cross bring everyone who should willingly take it up! Bring every such one to follow in the footsteps already made up that sacred mount; and so following, bring them to that same, "It is finished."

She fell on her knees before the rock, borne down by the flood of revelation which overwhelmed her. Fell on them for the first time in her life from an inward prompting instead of a matter of form. And for the first time in her life she felt what it was to worship God; to worship in spirit and in truth; for she, at last, could dimly see God through seeing what it was to be God-like.

She pressed closer to the cross, laying her breast against it, with her hands clasped on the top of the rock, Oh, not in vain had she come to her old friend for help! Its silent voice had taught what no human tongue had ever uttered for her and had opened her ears to hear the voice of God in her own soul, calling, "Come up higher!"

"Even if it be by way of the cross?" she questioned.

"Even if it be by way of the cross, for it is the *living* way."

And she bowed her head upon it and said, "I will take it up!"

"Murva!"

Who called? She sprang to her feet. There, on the

other side of the rock, stood Harold Deering. Was it he? Did her eyes tell her truly, or was it only the outpicturing of her own vivid fancy?

He spoke no word, only looked at her with that gaze which she knew so well, and which seemed to draw her toward him whether she would or no.

She covered her eyes with one hand for an instant while she held to the rock with the other and then looked again. Yes, it was he, and, oh, what a look was growing in his face! He did not move, but he held out his arms to her and said, "Come!"

For a moment she held to the rock with both her hands, leaned against the cross and half bowed over it without taking her eyes from his face, for she could not.

He waited; he did not move; only still held out his arms and said again, in a tone which made her quiver from head to foot with a nameless feeling, "Come!"

Slowly her hands slipped from the rock. Slowly, and without moving her eyes from his, she began to move round it, with her right hand stretched toward him and her left over the cross. Slowly, with a smile on her lips and a radiance on her face from the risen sun within, till her hand touched his and he seized it, carrying it over his shoulder and drawing her quickly and passionately into his arms, which closed around her as if they nevermore would open to let her go.

Her head fell upon his breast, her breath almost died away, she could not speak if she would! And she had no need of words. Feeling was enough! Had she found heaven so soon?

He raised her head and looked in her face. It was heavy on his arm and her eyes were half closed. He laid his lips on hers, drawing her still closer to his breast; and at that touch she trembled and began to

struggle in his arms as if she would break away from him.

But he still held her close while he looked in her eyes and said in a low tone, intense with feeling, "My darling! My darling! Do you think that I will let you go, now that I have you at last?"

As she heard his voice she ceased to struggle, but tears filled her eyes and threatened to overflow them. He kissed the lids down to keep them back as he said again, "My darling! Mine now! And I have longed to hold you in my arms and call you mine every moment since I saw you."

Her lips trembled as she began, "But, Mr. Deering——"

He laughed quietly. "We will have no buts in the matter, if you please. Possession is nine points of the law."

"But indeed," persisted Murva, as she made new efforts to free herself, which were so vigorous he released her, though he placed her with her back to the rock and stook in front of her. "I—you—came upon me so suddenly—I was so surprised that I do not yet know—and she hesitated and ceased speaking, while her hands clasped each other tightly, and she looked past him on either side as if calculating the chances of getting away should she run.

"Neither do I yet know," he said gently, for he saw that her womanly pride was beginning to take alarm. "Say only these few words—'I love you, and I will be your wife!'—and then you shall go—if you wish to."

Here was the love she had longed for and had laid down. Behind her was the cross of self-abnegation she had meant to take up instead. But, oh, this

love was sweet! Sweeter in this moment than ever she had imagined it before! Could she give the one for the other?

He stood before her, waiting for her answer, his arms folded and his head a little bent. He was the respectful suppliant now, not the master. What ought she to do?

"Mr. Deering," she began timidly, "are you sure that——"

"Yes, Miss Kroom, I am," he interrupted quickly, with an especial emphasis on the "Miss Kroom," while he smiled quizzically.

"But you have known me such a very little while," she went on, "and it would be wiser to——"

"Murva, dear!" he interrupted again; "I want the answer of your heart, not your head!"

Would Dr. Crawford have recognised Harold Deering?

"Let it speak for me and quickly! I have waited years, it seems to me." And he looked at her imploringly, while he stretched his hands again toward her.

Murva could not resist this pleading, for it had been her head, not her heart, that hesitated; and all else was put by as her hands again met and rested in his, and she said in a low clear voice, "I love you, and I will be your wife."

And again he drew her to him, close and closer yet, while he said, "My wife! My own darling! Now you will rest in my arms, for there is your refuge and your home!" And Murva did not struggle, as she felt his lips again press hers. Only a great content welled up within her, and she forgot where she was, forgot home and father, with all the unhappiness she had experienced, forgot the children she was to care

for, forgot all but that, at last, the greatest gift the world could bestow had come to her and was her very own. Only that one great fact, made so by that one presence, which was all the world to her, remained. With him was all. Without him was nothing.

Her hand crept up slowly to his head and wandered caressingly through his hair, as she looked up into his eyes and he looked down into hers, each drinking in from the other the subtle elixir which seemed to blend their being in one. And to Murva it seemed as if the solid earth had melted away, and they alone remained —a world in themselves.

But she was the first to rouse from this ecstasy, and begin to question. How had he come there that day when he seemed more like a vision than his real self? And Harold laughed and pointed to a very matter-of-fact horse and carriage fastened a short distance up the road, while he lifted her in his arms and swung her lightly on the top of the rock saying " There ! sit there safely out of the snow while I tell you all about it."

And leaning there, with his arms about her, he told her all that had transpired since he saw her last. He told her of his battle that last evening in Millville ; how he loved her then, but was afraid to admit it to himself. How her face had haunted him from that moment to this. How he had tried to settle himself in some business in New York and forget his inclinations, which drew him constantly back to where she was. How, do what he would, he could not lose sight of her for a moment ; and how this love grew up in him stronger and stronger till he could endure absence from her no longer, and determined to go and end it all one way or the other, hoping that this glad holiday time would bring for him the priceless gift of her love—that he,

too, might say out of a full heart, "Peace on earth and good-will toward men!"

They talked till the gathering shadows warned them that it was time to find their way back to town; and Murva had first to go and say good-bye to the children. Their round eyes stared in amazement as they saw the "stranger man" with Miss Murva; but when they inspected their home-knit yarn stockings in the grey light of Christmas morning, a shining gold coin in each showed that Santa Claus had had special instructions in their behalf.

Murva and Harold Deering drove slowly back to town, he pressing her for consent to an early marriage, for why should they wait? What had either of them to wait for? Murva, with a young woman's natural reluctance for a sudden transition to wifehood, hesitated to consent when he urged it for "this day fortnight," and reminded him that there might be obstacles neither of them had taken into consideration. What would her father say?

Harold thought there was no better time than the present to find out, and announced his intention of waiting upon her father that very evening and preferring the request for his daughter's hand. Murva felt a little sinking at her heart, with all her happiness, as he said this. She wondered how her father would receive Mr. Deering's application—she had not yet arrived at "Harold" even in her own thoughts—and she had a foreboding, which was more from knowledge of her father's nature than from any possible objection to Mr. Deering, that he might not acquiesce in her choice.

It was evening when they reached Murva's home, and she led him directly to the family sitting-room where never Nicholas Kroom and his wife.

Murva's father was sitting by the table, on which was the shaded lamp, by whose help he always read his evening paper, and which, table and all, was sacred to him alone; for does not a man like to be comfortable in his own home?

He looked up in surprise as they entered, and pushed up his spectacles, the better to see whom Murva had with her.

"Ah! Um! Mr. Deering, is it? Glad to see you, sir! Glad to see you! Have a chair, sir. Delightful weather we're having, Mr. Deering."

Harold paid necessary conversational tribute to the weather, while Murva quietly left the room. Her stepmother looked after her as she went, took a good look at Mr. Deering, whose greeting caused her to declare to herself, "A gentleman born, he is!" and settled back in her chair, while a look of satisfaction stole over her face. She, womanlike, saw what was coming, and rejoiced at the prospect of at last having her husband to herself.

Harold wasted no time and took no roundabout way, but in a few earnest, manly words informed Mr. Kroom of his feelings toward his daughter, and requested his consent to their marriage.

Nicholas Kroom's newspaper fell to the floor, and for a minute he looked as if he were going to follow it. He was taken genuinely by surprise. He had not given a thought to Mr. Deering after the two or three days succeeding his former visit. Murva had never mentioned him, and the idea had never entered his head that there could be anything between them.

"Wh—why! you do not know my daughter, sir. You do not know my daughter, and she does not know you! She does not know you, sir!" Repetition meant

emphasis sometimes with Nicholas Kroom. "I cannot—really, sir! I cannot——"

"Pardon me, Mr. Kroom," interrupted Harold. "I admit that, so far as time is concerned, I have not known your daughter long. But I know her well enough to be sure of my feelings toward her, and she has assured me of her own."

This information touched Mr. Kroom in a tender spot. He should have been consulted first.

"That has nothing to do with it, sir—nothing to do with it! I do not know you—you are a stranger to me, sir!"

"You are correct in your *last* statement, Mr. Kroom," replied Harold, quietly but pointedly. "I am, as you say, a stranger to you. But I can and will furnish you with indisputable evidence of my character and position, as well as of my ability to adequately provide for your daughter."

"That is all very well, sir. All quite right and proper. But the fact remains that you are a stranger, sir,—a stranger."

"But I do not wish to remain so, Mr. Kroom, if you will give me the opportunity of becoming more. That is a fact which is easily remedied."

"Not so easily, sir! Not so easily as you imagine, sir!" with a lofty wave of the hand. "It is incumbent upon one to maintain a proper degree of reserve under such circumstances; and my daughter must wait, sir, till I consider the matter in my own mind, and decide what is best for her to do."

This consideration of himself, without the least regard for any wish of Murva's, together with his pompous assumption of absolute authority, nettled Harold, who was equally unused to opposition, and he replied rashly,

"Your daughter's decision is the only essential one, Mr. Kroom, and it has already been given."

Nicholas Kroom fairly choked with astonishment and rage. What! He, Nicholas Kroom, to be set one side by this young man as if his decision were of no account! He would show him! He would see if he was not master in his own family!

"How dare you, sir!" he began, rising from his chair, and striking his clenched hand upon the table. "How dare you speak to me in that manner? I would have you to know, sir, that——"

The door opened, and Murva entered the room. She had heard her father's excited tones upstairs and ran hastily down, fearing, she knew not what. Harold had risen also, and was standing before her father with his lips compressed, and his whole attitude expressive of a strong effort at restraint.

She went directly toward him, and placed herself at his side, while she looked steadily at her father and asked, "What is the matter, father?"

"Matter!" he shouted, his face almost crimson. "This fellow dares to tell me to my face that my opinion is of no consequence and my decision worthless. Come away from him! Go to your own room and leave me to deal with him. I'll show him that Nicholas Kroom's authority is not to be laughed at. Do you hear me?"

And he stamped his foot upon the floor as he saw that Murva did not stir.

"Father, wait a moment," she said, imploringly. "You are mistaken. You must have misunderstood Mr. Deering. He never would speak to you with intentional disrespect. He——"

"You know nothing about it," interrupted her father,

furiously. "You were not here. I tell you again to come away from him, and go to your own room."

Murva felt that Harold was getting dangerous. She could feel the mighty effort he was making for self-control, for his blood was surging with indignation at the way Mr. Kroom addressed his daughter. Her own resentment was roused that her father could treat her thus in the supreme moment of her life; and she knew that if Harold had spoken in any such manner to him, his own unwarranted behaviour had provoked it.

She laid her hand on Harold's arm and said firmly, looking her father steadily in the face, "I refuse to obey you! I do not recognise your right thus to command me. My choice is made, and I abide by it."

And Harold, taking her hand in his own, placed his other arm around her and faced her father with an unyielding determination expressed in his face and attitude.

This sight was too much for Nicholas Kroom. He took a step forward, hesitated, and dropped in his chair, with one hand at his collar as if seeking to loosen it, while he gasped for breath. Mrs. Kroom ran to him, while Murva drew Harold toward the door, saying, "Go away now, Mr. Deering. It is of no use to say more to him to-night, and it will only make matters worse if you remain."

He allowed her to lead him into the hall, and closed the door behind them. Taking her face between his hands he looked lovingly into her eyes, and said, tenderly, "My poor child! What a life you have led!" His tones brought the tears with a rush to her eyes, but she forced them back, saying simply, with the tremulous lips she could not control, "He is my father."

Harold drew her head to his breast, and pressed his lips on her quivering ones, as he said, "This is nearly over for you. No more bondage, but freedom in my love."

As they stood thus for a moment, Murva felt that the long, loveless years were behind her, and before her stretched a future rich with blessings. She heard again the tones of her father's voice, and she led Mr. Deering towards the front door.

"I shall return in the morning," he said, "and I hope to find your father more rational then. But, whatever comes, remember that you belong to me now, and not to him." And, holding her closely, he whispered once more in her ear, "My wife!" and went away.

Murva went back to the room, and, looking in, saw that her father was sitting in his accustomed place, while her stepmother was quietly sewing. His head was bowed upon his breast, and he did not notice her. She went upstairs, deeming it wiser to say no more that night. The recent occurrence, painful as it was, had no power to destroy the blissful consciousness that was hers since Harold Deering declared his love for her. Where now was the loneliness, the heartache, the misery, which had been her portion ever since she could remember? Gone like the night dreams which the sunshine puts out because they are not enduring realities.

She did not light her lamp. She felt no need of it. It seemed as if her whole being was so flooded with joy that her inward illumination was light for her. She sat by her window and looked out upon the quiet night, feeling as if she were of kin to it; as if she shared its brooding calm and peace; as if this were the consciousness and surety that, coming nearer and nearer was the

day king whose embrace should rouse and bring forth every now quietly sleeping possibility to such a rich blossoming and fruitage as she had never even dreamed of.

She felt as if she were only just beginning to know herself; as if her own inner nature had suddenly opened to her, and she could not yet sound its depths; as if a mysterious something awaited her which just now was beginning to reach her with its far-off touch; and again from beyond the far-distant horizon, from the eastern horizon of her own being, came that voice which was more sense than sound, "Wait for the fullness of the time!"

She slid to her knees, trembling with the intensity of feeling rousing in her, with the dawning and growing conviction that sometime and somehow there was something for her to achieve; something which raised her to a height where alone it was possible and on whose summit dwelt glory and joy ineffable.

As she was wrapt in this exaltation, suddenly the cross on the rock stood out before her,—stood out so vividly that she saw it all: the silent wood, the deserted road, and the lonely rock, with the cross which was part of itself, hidden from the travellers who passed by, revealed only to those who paused to learn a lesson from the silent witness.

There it stood changeless, day after day, neither washed away by the storm nor melted by the sun, bearing its testimony to the destiny of human nature, pointing the way to the triumph of the divine over the human. Had she turned from the cross, and had it followed her to remind her of her silent pledge?

She seemed to be standing before it. She was no longer in her room, but in the wood. Those silent

sentinels, the trees, saluted her as she stood before the cross, which began to sparkle and to shine till it was transparent, and she saw through and beyond it by means of its own light, though all around was darkness.

And in that light she saw a woman bearing a cross which rested partly upon her shoulder and partly upon the ground; dragging it along a dry and dusty road, alone. The woman's back was bent beneath her burden—so bent with the weight of the cross that her face was toward the earth. She staggered as she walked, and sometimes she fell to her knees, and sometimes her face was prone in the dust. Sometimes she lay still for a while, and sometimes she struggled to her feet when she felt the touch of the ground. But the dust clung to her face, so that she had to brush with her hand to see her way; and the sweat poured down through the dust and besmeared her face—the sweat that was wrung from her by her toil,—and it was mixed with blood.

Whether she fell or whether she walked, the cross remained fast. It never slipped off. And in her footprints as she passed along the road there was blood. Beside it grew flowers; but when the woman reached out and plucked them, there were only dry weeds in her hand. Here and there were fountains of sparkling water, but when she stooped to drink they dried up before her lips could touch it. Stout poles formed arbours overgrown with vines; but when she sought to sit down and rest the cross prevented her; and when she grasped one of these as a staff to lean upon, it broke like a reed in her hand.

She looked to the right and she looked to the left, but nowhere was there help to carry the cross; and the pale dry lips of the woman moved and seemed to say,

"If he would but carry the other end!" But there was no one in sight, and the end upon the ground dragged more heavily and cut a deep furrow in the earth.

She clasped her hands in prayer, she stood still and prayed, but still the cross was fast to her shoulder, while her back but bent the more.

Slowly and more slowly she toiled on, while great gasps of agony broke from her lips. She reached up her hands and tried to lift the burden from her shoulder, but she only bruised the hands. Slowly and more slowly till she stood still and her hands dropped at her side, clenched in despair.

Then from above, the heavens opened, and a white dove descended, coming nearer and nearer, straight down to the woman, till it reached and nestled against her heart. Then it began to ascend and the woman, roused by its touch, raised her head and looked after it.

It rose higher and higher, the woman raised her head higher and higher, and held it back to follow the dove, farther and farther, little by little. And her bent back straightened little by little, and the cross slipped little by little, till her face was squarely upturned to the above, till her back was straight, till she stood erect; and then the cross fell to the ground.

And on the woman's face as she gazed shone the light of a joy unutterable, and the dust, and the sweat, and the blood were gone. She stretched forth her hands to the heavens, and there was no bruise upon them. She was straight, and strong, and supple and fair. And her voice rang full and clear as she sang, "Now shall peace reign on the earth, for the weak have become strong, and captivity is led captive."

And from afar off, like a distant echo, came the words, "It is by way of the cross!"

And the woman answered, "Amen!"

And all was gone, and Murva found herself kneeling by the window in the darkness; and she was cold and tired as if she had gone a long journey. She rose to her feet and prepared hastily for bed; while in her ears as she sank to sleep sounded constantly, "Amen! and Amen!"

CHAPTER XVI.

CHRISTMAS morning found Nicholas Kroom in no holiday frame of mind. He had slept but illy, and had by no means recovered from his rage of the previous evening. He could not for a moment allow that his daughter should act entirely independent of him, and it was even harder for him to understand that she meant to marry and leave him altogether. It was no wonder that he was totally unprepared for this possibility, for he had seen none of the preliminaries which usually precede such a result, and, as he truthfully said, Mr. Deering was a stranger to him.

While the thought of Murva's marriage some time, had crossed his mental horizon now and then in the last year or two, he had never thought of it enough to make it seem in any wise near at hand, only a remote possibility, and when he should deem it best. And it had never been made less remote by having the attentions of young gentlemen come under his observation. Murva, as a "peculiar girl," did not attract the average young man; and her father's reputation did not make his home a favourite visiting place. So the lack of experience usual to parents of marriageable daughters made him the less prepared to receive the petitions of a would-be suitor. Add to this, his natural obstinacy and his natural self-constituted authority over his

daughter for life and death, and it could hardly be expected that he would at once yield assent to Mr. Deering's request.

And, to do him justice, he also felt it unwise in Murva to accept an offer of marriage from a man of whom she knew so little. Having a nature which made love no necessity for him, he could not understand or even conceive the incessant longing of Murva's half-starved soul, and so could only see in her attitude the use of the occasion for an open defiance of his authority—a view fostered by the change in her manner since her return from her visit to the Meltons. One thing he was sure of: proper deference had not been paid him, and this had to be atoned for before he would listen to any proposition or make any concession.

The morning meal passed in silence, Murva revolving in her mind the wisdom of opening the subject with her father or waiting for him to do so. He did not speak to her when she came downstairs, did not even acknowledge her "good-morning," and she saw that he bore the traces of a very uncomfortable night. Mrs. Kroom was unusually affable with Murva, and pressed her to eat when she saw that the girl was taking but little more than a cup of coffee. Murva busied herself upstairs for some little time after breakfast, expecting all the while to hear her father's voice calling for her to come down. But no summons came, and knowing that Harold would be there before long she finally resolved to open the matter for herself. She found her father sitting where she had left him the previous evening, and in much the same attitude.

"Father," she began timidly, for she desired to avoid angering him, if possible, "Mr. Deering is an

old friend of Dr. Crawford's. You will remember that I told you so when he was here before. I am sure that he will be able to satisfy you perfectly as to——"

"I will take care that he does satisfy me perfectly!" interrupted her father. "And he shall make me an ample apology—an humble apology. Never you fear but that I'll deal with him. But, first, I have got something to say to you. Why are you so ready to take the first man that offers and turn your back on your home and your father?"

Murva's first impulse was to reply, "Because these have been neither a home nor a father to me!" But she restrained it, and said instead, ignoring his coarse allusion, "Is it not inevitable that marriage must cause separation from one's former home?"

"That's not the point, and you know it," returned her father. "What business have you to go and engage yourself to a man who is a stranger to me, who has never seen fit to address himself to me in the first place, as he should have done, and do all this behind my back without a word to me, your lawful father? And what does it show on your part, you ungrateful child, to deceive me so?"

"Father!" exclaimed Murva quickly, as the colour began to glow in her cheeks, "I have not deceived you. I have not seen Mr. Deering since the day I went to drive with him, till yesterday; and you knew of that circumstance. And he came to you at once after I had answered him. Indeed, we neither of us deserve such treatment at your hands." And she looked at him proudly and indignantly.

"You do not deserve rebuke and even punishment when you, my own child, set yourself against my authority as you did last night to take sides with a

man whom you have not known six months? Where is your gratitude for all I have done for you?"

Murva could restrain herself no longer. Those last words of her father's were like a match to gunpowder. She forgot that, when all was said and done, he was still her father. Forgot her life-long deference to him, and remembered only the weary, lonely years, the harshness and unkindness which had made a prison of her home and shut her out from all the sunshine and joy of girlhood.

"Where is my gratitude for what you have done for me?" she repeated, as she looked him steadily in the face. "I have none! Does a prisoner feel gratitude for the jailor who locks him in the cell and leaves him to wear his heart out in tears and solitude? Does the dumb animal feel gratitude for the hand that feeds him only that it may derive the more benefit from his labour? Does the convict condemned to the mines feel gratitude to the powers that spare his life but shut out from him all that can make life desirable, even to the free air and sunshine? I look back over my life, father, and I can remember nothing to be specially grateful to you for. You have fed and clothed me, I have had a seat at your table and a bed under your roof; but I have had no home. From my earliest recollection I have never even been able to know what a home is. I have grown up, I do not know how, existing from day to day, but never living; never experiencing that sense of living which belonged to my years. I have felt as if I were half a corpse, dragging around with me a dead semblance of myself. Every natural impulse in me has been frozen into silence, and I have been starved, yes, starved for that which is life itself to every human soul, till the cur fondness of the very dogs in the street has

been grateful to me. You have never shown me one spark of love since I can remember. You have always treated me as your goods and chattel, to go here and go there, to fetch and carry according to your humour. Never in my whole life have you treated me as an individual, responsible, human being. And you expect me to be grateful to you for this? Why should you not rather expect that my heart would be as hard as the nether-millstone? Is that the way to develop gratitude?"

Murva had risen to her feet as she spoke, and now stood before him, towering above him like an avenging angel, her face pale and set, her eyes dark with excited feeling.

"Twenty-one years I have lived this life," she went on, "and at last the day of my deliverance has come. And shall I not welcome it as the prisoner welcomes the time when his prison door is opened and he is set free? Is not that a time for rejoicing rather than for lamentation? Why do I accept Mr. Deering? Because he loves me, and because I love him. Because I have known in the few weeks that I have known him, more joy and comfort than all my twenty-one years outside of them contains. Because, stranger as he is, I can put my hand in his and go forth to meet the unknown future fearlessly, feeling that there can be no misery worse than my past, no home more insufficient than mine has always been, no life harder to bear than a loveless one. And after my twenty-one years of bondage I stand to-day a free woman, because I claim my freedom, and will no longer submit to your tyranny."

She paused, her bosom heaving, her head proudly erect, her whole person transformed. Her father had sunk back in his chair and was looking at her with

wide-open eyes, the very embodiment of combined amazement and offended dignity. He was too astonished to speak at once as Murva ceased and gave him the opportunity. He was really unable to find words, he was so overpowered by this outburst from the daughter who, till lately, had never spoken to him otherwise than submissively. But as she continued silent his despotic disposition began to get the better of his surprise and he began,

"What do you mean? Have you gone clean crazy? Have not your twenty-one years shown you that you cannot talk to me like this?" And he struck his hand violently on the arm of his chair, his passion increasing as he went on. "I am master in my own house, and as long as you are in it you shall feel that fact. How dare you tell me to my face that I have mistreated you? By —— you shall find out what a father's authority is!" and he advanced threateningly toward her.

Murva stepped to the other side of the table and held out her hand imploringly. She realised that her outburst, while it had been provoked by his own unwarranted attitude, had only made matters worse, for it had excited him to the point where he was nearly beside himself; and, while she could not take back a single word she had said, she regretted that she had spoken.

"Wait, father! Wait a moment, I implore you, and think well of what you are about to do. Remember what you owe to yourself as well as to me. Remember that I am no longer a child and——"

But her father, now fairly maddened by his blind, unreasoning passion, caught the table and whirled it aside with a crash, while he came toward her with his hand raised above his head, as if he would fell her to

the ground. Murva's heart stood still, and she swayed as if she would fall before he reached her, when, just as her father's hand was about to descend, the door was thrown open and Harold Deering caught her in his arms, throwing her to one side and back of him while with his other hand he grasped and held her father's upraised arm. Mrs. Kroom stood, with a scared face, in the doorway leading to the kitchen, afraid either to enter the room or go back.

For a moment they stood thus, surprise at his sudden entrance keeping Mr. Kroom in the position in which Harold had found him. Murva moved and Harold dropped her father's arm to place her in a chair where she sat, white and trembling with the strain she had been subjected to. He stood between her and her father and said quietly, while he looked him steadily in the eye, "Mr. Kroom, you had better deal with a man in this matter instead of a woman. Your methods are not suited to her organisation."

The frenzy was ebbing, and Nicholas Kroom, in his turn, sank into his chair, breathing heavily. His face was dark, almost purple, and a white foam specked his lips. Mrs. Kroom came quickly to his side with a basin of cold water, and loosening the clothing about his neck began to bathe his face and head. Murva was faint and sick with this exhibition of purely brute passion and ferocity on her father's part; and Harold, seeing that immediate danger was over, sat down beside her and endeavoured to soothe her.

"Do not be afraid, my darling!" he said in a low tone. "You are safe while I am here, and you shall not be exposed to farther indignity. I will try to induce your father to listen to reason, but if he will not, we must do that which is the only alternative."

"How did you find your way in just at that moment?" asked Murva in a low tone.

"I rang the bell, but as it was not answered I suppose no one heard it in the excitement of the moment. I have been uneasy about you all the morning, and when the door was not opened I tried it and found it unlocked, so I stepped in and heard your father's voice; his tone convinced me that I was needed and that immediately," answered Harold.

Meanwhile Mr. Kroom had recovered his self-control, so far as he was ever capable of exercising it, and motioning his wife impatiently away, rose and walked up and down the floor without speaking. Harold remained quietly by Murva's side, showing by his manner that he did not intend to leave it, and waited for Mr. Kroom to speak. The latter finally seated himself, and began, with a deliberation which showed that he had put a great constraint upon himself.

"You have seen fit, sir, to intrude yourself into my house and interfere between me and my family. My daughter has seen fit to insult her father and her home. Before any conversation can take place between us these matters must be adjusted."

Murva was about to speak, but Harold laid his hand on hers and said composedly, "My entrance into your house in this manner would be unjustifiable, Mr. Kroom, did not the circumstances warrant it. I think we can all see that it has saved what you would bitterly regret when it was too late. And now I beg to say that I have no desire but to give due consideration to your just claims as Murva's father, and to satisfy them in the fullest possible manner. I have with me this morning a portion of the evidence which I assured you last evening I could furnish you; and more shall be

forthcoming. You are quite right to exercise due caution in a matter so nearly concerning your daughter's happiness and well-being; and I am prepared and willing to meet whatever can be reasonably exacted in this direction. This part of the matter comes within your own proper jurisdiction. The rest concerns your daughter's feelings only, and is for her to decide. As her decision has already been given, we both wait your pleasure before making further definite arrangements."

As Harold ceased, Nicholas Kroom raised his arm and pointing directly at his daughter said: "She told me this morning that she owed me nothing! That she had had neither a father nor a home!"

Murva started forward and fell on her knees at her father's feet, clasping his outstretched hand in her own.

"Oh, father," she cried, "forgive me for wounding you! I am sorry that I spoke as I did. I should have remembered that you are my father and bridled my tongue. Please, please forgive me!" And she looked up at him imploringly, while the tears ran down her cheeks.

"Do you take back what you said?" demanded her father. "Do you acknowledge that you spoke untruthfully?"

Murva hesitated. She could not admit this, for every word she had said was true, and she would be untruthful did she answer as was demanded of her. "I cannot say that, father!" she replied gently. "But I am very sorry that I spoke at all."

"Then, take that!" answered Nicholas Kroom. And, wrenching his hand from her detaining clasp, he struck her a stinging blow across the cheek as she knelt before him.

Harold Deering sprang forward with what sounded

very like an oath, and made as if he would have throttled her father, but Murva threw herself against him and climbed up to her feet while she clung to him. Harold would have shaken her off, for his anger was hot, and for the instant he had no thought save of punishment for the indignity; but she wound her arms around him and called, "Harold, dear Harold, stop and think! Let it go. Remember he is my father!"

Her voice and touch had its effect—it was the first time she had called him "Harold"—and controlling himself with a mighty effort he said, "I am accustomed, sir, to dealing with gentlemen, and not with brutes, and so used, naturally, the methods in vogue among such in my dealings with you. But I perceive that they are not suited to your comprehension any more than yours are to mine, and that an amicable understanding between us is, consequently, impossible. But one other course is left me." And turning to Murva he continued, "Come with me now, for I cannot and will not leave you here."

"Oh, Harold," exclaimed Murva piteously, "I cannot leave my home like this! I must not. I will try again to——"

"You will take back what you have said, admitting that you were untruthful, and give up that stranger who has made all this trouble between us, or leave my home which you have spurned!"

Her father had risen to his feet, and as he spoke he walked to the door leading into the hall and threw it open, passed into and along the hall and opened the outside door also. As he retraced his steps Murva started with horror in her face, but Harold held her back and close to his side.

Nicholas Kroom pointed to the door and continued,

"Take your choice: stay by that man and refuse me my due, and there lies your way!"

"Oh, father," exclaimed Murva imploringly, trying to break away from Harold's detaining clasp, "you will not send me away like this!"

"Make your choice and quickly," demanded her father, still pointing. "You boasted of your freedom from me and my authority, and I am equally free from any obligation to you."

"Oh, what can I do!" cried Murva, wringing her hands.

"Come!" answered Harold drawing her towards the door. "Do not say another word, but go upstairs and get such of your things as you can conveniently carry, while I wait for you in the hall," and he continued to urge her in that direction.

"Answer me," demanded her father again. "Will you give him up, and do as I bid you?"

"Oh, father," answered Murva, turning her pale, agonised face toward him, "I will do anything that I can do, but I cannot give him up. I am sorry that——"

"Then, go! beggar that you are! Nothing that is in this house shall go with you, for it is mine. Go with what you stand in, and go this instant. Never darken my door again so long as you live, for I spurn you now and for ever. Go, I say!" and he stamped upon the floor.

Harold waited no longer, but lifted Murva from her feet and bore her into the hall. A large shawl was lying on a chair, seizing this he wrapped it hastily around her and carried her to the street, where he put her in the carriage he had waiting. Her eyes were closed, and her head fell back as he placed her upon the seat. He covered her warmly with the carriage-

robes and drove rapidly to Mr. Melton's. Fortunately Dr. Crawford was at home, and assisted him to carry Murva's insensible form into the house.

After a few moments' examination he assured him there was no cause for alarm: that it was but an ordinary fainting-fit; and while Mrs. Melton attended Murva, Harold gave Donald an account of that morning's occurrences, together with the history of his acquaintance with her and the events which had led to this result.

Kate alone was not surprised, for the others had had no idea of an intimate acquaintance between Murva and Harold Deering. She remembered Murva's face when she told her of his departure, and she had felt that Murva was more interested in him than was apparent to others. So she rejoiced that Harold Deering had found his way back and that there was a mutual understanding between them, though her indignation against Mr. Kroom was hot, and was shared by the other members of the family when they heard the story of the morning's and the previous evening's proceedings.

Murva recovered quickly under the kindly ministrations of her friends, and Harold, after his friendly confidences with Dr. Crawford, which were followed by a conference with Mr. Melton, came to her and proposed that they be married that very afternoon, and leave for New York in the evening, saying that all could be arranged if she would but consent.

Poor Murva was nearly sent into another lapse of consciousness by this proposition; but when Harold, taking her hands in his, pointed out their present position and the needlessness of waiting for anything or anybody, as they had only themselves to consult; and when Kate, after an appeal to her, replied, "Why not?" and offered

to provide Murva with all necessaries from her own ample wedding outfit, which was in large part useless to her in her present state of health; and when Harold knelt before her with his arms round her, and said, "Murva, darling, are you not all mine now? There is no one else who has a claim upon you, and why should you not come into my keeping to-day as my very own? Why should I not, this very hour, have the right to care for you as only a husband can? You have only me, and I have but you—what is there that should rightfully hinder this? Trust me, my darling, and come to me to-day," she looked into his eyes and yielded a reluctant assent.

A few hours later in Kate's room—for she was unable as yet to go below stairs—Mr. Melton performed the marriage ceremony. And that evening Murva Deering and her husband bade farewell to their kind friends and departed for New York. On her cheek was the badge of her bondage, a red mark across its fair surface. On her finger was the badge of her newly-acquired freedom. The one was behind her, the other was before her.

In the middle of the night Dr. Crawford was awakened by a violent ringing of the door-bell. A neighbour of Nicholas Kroom's stood on the step, and said that Mrs. Kroom had sent him, with the request that the doctor come as quickly as possible, for something was the matter with Mr. Kroom. Donald hurried away immediately, and found Murva's father stretched in his bed, unable to move or speak.

"I heard a groan like," said Mrs. Kroom, "and I jumped up and lit the light as quick as I could. He was just as you see him now, except that he did not know anything at all; and now he seems to know us."

Mr. Kroom's eyes rested upon the faces beside him, as if he recognised them, and was striving to ask something, but no sound came from his lips, and he was as still as if he were dead.

Dr. Crawford finally motioned Mrs. Kroom from the room and said, "It is paralysis, Mrs. Kroom. I do not think the shock is necessarily fatal, but he will be as helpless as an infant while he lives."

The arm which had been raised in anger to strike his daughter would be raised no more, either in fury or appeal. The lips which had spurned her would utter henceforth neither curse nor blessing. Nicholas Kroom's reign was over, and Mrs. Kroom had her husband to herself.

CHAPTER XVII.

WEDDED life! What is it? Two lives so united as to be in effect but one? This would seem to be the meaning; but does experience bring forth that result?

Oh, marriage,—that paradise or purgatory, as the case may be,—how many loving hearts have found a heaven here below by means of thee! How many hearts capable of loving have worn their substance away till they were but mere dry shells, through that bondage which was called by thy name!

Seven years have passed since that Christmas day when Murva Kroom was driven—a beggar in all but one man's love and her own self-respect—from her father's door; and again it is Christmas day. The years that have gone have touched her only to bring out that which waited their touch; and she has developed into a beautiful—yes, in the best sense of the word—a noble-looking woman. Her tall and rather too slender form has become round and full. The slightly-inclined head and neck are erect and perfectly poised, while her whole figure gives one the sense of latent power. Sitting, standing, or moving about, it is the same. She conveys the impression of having the ability to achieve great things. Her face has changed and yet not changed, only matured, fulfilling its promise. It is sweet, dignified, noble, womanly. That is what one would say if asked to describe how she looked. A

few, the very few, who feel personal atmospheres, would say, "She is almost happy, but not quite. She seeks something she has not yet found."

On this Christmas day Murva was sitting by the fire in her beautiful drawing-room, waiting for her husband. They were to dine alone, as they always did on the anniversary of their wedding-day.

Harold Deering had become a solid and successful business man, having invested his money with a well-established and responsible firm shortly after his marriage. Everything had prospered with him, and now, in the prime of life, he was a thoroughly satisfied and prosperous man. If anyone had asked him if his married life had met his expectations he would have answered "yes" most heartily. And had he been asked if his wife's had been met as well, he would have answered "yes" as confidently and assuredly. There was not a cloud in his sky, and he could have seen none in Murva's.

She appeared to be much preoccupied as she sat by the fire. Evidently her old habit of "going away" was with her yet, to some extent. And that her thoughts were serious ones her face showed. Her mouth was set a little more decidedly than was natural, and now and then she drew a long breath, which seemed not so much a sigh as a throwing off of something which weighed on her. Her eyes, those glorious, soul-lit eyes, were a fascinating mystery. To try to read what was revealed in them was to quickly get beyond one's depth and cease to try. Now there was a certain melancholy, even sadness, lurking in them, though it was veiled by something nearer the surface which seemed to be kept there for the purpose. She rose abruptly from her seat, and paced up and down the room, as if

action were necessary to her thinking; and she seemed to be intent upon some matter in which she could not clearly see her way to a decision.

"I must do it, sooner or later," she said half aloud. "I cannot restrain what I feel much longer, cannot keep all this within me, and make no sign. The cross on the rock has been before me all day. Oh, what cowards we women are!" and she walked more rapidly up and down. "I wonder if I should have felt this way if my baby had lived."

A tear ran down her cheek, but she brushed it away as she heard her husband's latch-key in the door, and the expression of her face changed as she went out into the hall to meet him.

"Here I am, Murva!" he exclaimed jovially. "Now let us have dinner and——"

Murva had her arm in his, and was holding it in a tight clasp. "Why, my dear! You hold on to me as if you thought I meant to get away. Here is a letter for you from Millville—Kate, of course."

"We will read it together after dinner, dear," she said. "Come!"

She was a picture as she sat opposite him at the table that night, dressed in a soft grey silk, which in some mysterious way fell in folds from her shoulders to her feet without concealing the beautiful outlines of her form, her throat, bosom and arms shaded by rare and delicate lace that added to the veiled and mysterious beauty which one felt as much as saw in Murva's face. She had no liking for bright colours in her own toilette, though admiring them with others. She always wore fabrics rich in texture but quiet in tone; and while her passion for beautiful laces showed itself whenever there was opportunity she rarely wore jewelry.

Harold Deering was very proud of his wife; and as he looked at her, framed in by her luxurious surroundings—for his establishment was perfectly appointed in every respect, as only the home of those who have a cultivated and refined taste, combined with the means to gratify it, can be—he felt that he had made no mistake when he yielded to the promptings of his heart and silenced the reasonings of his head. Throughout these seven years she had been all that a wife should be. She had supplemented him at all points. She had always been sweet, yielding and loving; had ever recognised that his life lay more outside of the home than hers, and had offered no interference in his affairs or betrayed undue inquisitiveness regarding them. She had ever seemed to recognise that the man is the head of the house, and he had never been obliged to assert any authority. She had always seemed to meet any and all desires of his before they could be expressed. No, there was nothing in her or about her which he would change if he could. There was no more satisfied man in the whole city than he on this seventh anniversary of his wedding-day.

Dinner over, Murva read Kate's letter as they were seated side by side, and as she finished, she exclaimed, "Poor child! For all her bright and courageous words she feels more deeply than she allows to appear her invalid condition. I am glad she is coming to visit us. As Dr. Crawford is to spend a week in New York on account of professional matters, she can come with him, whereas she would fear to undertake the journey without him. Oh, Harold, how thankful I am that I am a strong, healthy woman."

"Of course you are, Murva; and your thankfulness is not exceeded by mine. A man has a hard lot who

is burdened with an invalid wife. But I do not know of anyone better able to get on in such a case than Donald Crawford. Fortunately for his wife he is one man in a thousand."

An unexplainable look passed over Murva's face as she listened to her husband's words; and she seemed to draw herself together slightly, as if to resist something unpleasant.

"I do not suppose she will ever be well now," Harold went on: "and her husband will have to bear his burden through life. There is a deal of luck about marriage after all." And he looked musingly into the fire.

"I have never seen the slightest symptom of dissatisfaction or even impatience in Dr. Crawford during my visits to Kate," said Murva. "He has always been unfailingly tender and kind, devoted to her comfort and happiness. I have no doubt but that he is disappointed in his professional ambition; for he gives himself so much to Kate and her parents that he cannot carry out any extended work. But I am sure he has his compensation in their devoted love, their almost wor ship."

"My dear," replied Harold, "a woman's idea of compensation and a man's are, probably, widely different. She can be content with far less than satisfies him. Marriage is her aim and end. For him it is only a step on the way to something else, and it can help or hamper him."

"Why should marriage be a woman's aim and end, Harold?" asked his wife quietly.

"Why? Why because it is her destiny. Because it is what her nature fits her for," he answered, with a tinge of surprise in his tone.

"But why should it not be a step on the way to

something else for her as well as for the man?" continued Murva.

"Why, what is there outside of or beyond marriage for a woman?" asked Harold: and this time his surprise was open and undisguised. "Does not all she is become merged in her husband? It belongs to him to fill the places and act the part in the world that lie outside of the family and the home. His nature enables him to cope with difficulties and overcome them. Hers compels her to lead the home life or become unsexed. Murva, if there is any one thing I am thankful for, it is that you are not one of the strong-minded women who want to act like men. If you were, I should think my fate incomparably worse than Dr. Crawford's." And he leaned back in his chair and looked at her with very open satisfaction.

Murva flushed slightly, and looked down instead of at him as she replied, "I have not the least desire to fill a man's place, Harold dear. You know that. I am satisfied to be a woman, and shall be content to fill a woman's place worthily. But this I do want to do; and it seems to me that it cannot be done if a woman is wholly merged in her husband—if she has no individuality of her own." Her voice wavered a little as she ceased.

"Why, Murva! what crotchet have you got in your head now?" and he looked at her inquiringly.

She rose suddenly from her chair and threw herself on her knees beside him, the folds of her dress swirling about her, with her rapid movement, like a silver-grey cloud out of which rose her beautiful head, which she laid upon his breast, while she raised her face to his.

"Tell me, my husband," she said as she threw her

arm over his shoulder and drew herself nearer to him, "have I been a good wife to you?"

"Have you, my darling? Why, surely! The best a man ever had." And he put his arm around her as she knelt and kissed her lovingly.

Murva closed her eyes, and the eyelids trembled as if there were tears behind them.

"Why do you ask me?" he went on.

Murva did not answer immediately, but after a moment said gently, as she stroked his face, "Because dear, there is something growing within me which impels me to speech; to saying what I do not clearly understand myself. I must speak, and I do not know what to say; do not know how to give utterance to what I feel without wounding you; and you are so good I cannot bear to do that." And she held him closely again.

"Why, Murva, child! what is the matter with you?" And he held her face from him and looked at her curiously. "Tell me what it is?" he said kindly.

"Oh, I want to, and I do not know how!" she replied, and her voice was suspiciously near a sob.

He raised her from the floor and seated her upon his knee, holding her there with one arm while he took both of her hands in his.

"Now, then, confess, my dear, and ease your soul," he said laughingly.

Murva seemed to make a special effort after a moment's hesitation, and said falteringly, "What you said just now about a woman being merged in her husband does not seem to me quite right. And that is just what I am becoming more and more. I feel as if I was being swallowed up, and I do not want to be swallowed up." And she looked at him pleadingly.

"Why, what do you mean, Murva?" he said astonished. "What is it that you do want?"

"I do not know that I want anything, Harold. But I do want to be myself."

He felt the hands he held in his tremble a little. He did not know whether to laugh at her or take her seriously. He could not yet see what she really meant.

"My darling," he said finally, "I want to do everything for you that I can. What is it that I have not done?"

"Oh, that is just it, Harold!" cried Murva. "I do not want to be done for all the time. I want to do for myself. I want to feel and act like a responsible being."

"But, my dear, you do that now, so far as a married woman can. You have your own way here at home. I do not interfere with you in your conduct of affairs. The responsibility in your own domain is all yours, is it not?"

"Yes, Harold dear, that is all true, but that is not what I mean," replied Murva, bravely endeavouring to go on in what was manifestly a most difficult task for her. "It seems to me that though I am a married woman, the woman comes before the married part. That is, that I have an individual responsibility as a woman which comes before my responsibility as a married woman, and as if the first was entirely overlooked in the last. Because, you know, the last exists only in connection with you, while the first existed for me before ever I saw you."

"Well," said her husband, with an amused look as she paused, "go on! What comes next?"

"Why don't you see, dear—do not laugh!—that if I, as a wife, must be merged in my husband, that takes

away entirely my individual responsibility, my individuality as a woman, and makes me merely a part of you? And something within me protests against this! The 'I' of me clamours for its own place and recognition. It is independent of you, and must be, for it was, before you came into my life. It must not be swallowed up; it must keep its own place and be given that which belongs to it." And her breath came quickly, and her hands moved nervously as she paused and looked, half-defiantly, half-pleadingly, into her husband's eyes.

Harold remained silent. He was fairly puzzled. He did not understand this outburst from his gentle, loving Murva, and could not yet see what she was after. Vague misgivings of some latent strong-mindedness of the abhorred type flitted through his mind, but they were not well enough defined to come to speech.

"I am not complaining, Harold dear," she went on, as he did not reply. "I am not finding fault with you. You know I am not. It is the—the—I do not know what to call it; the thing itself, the fact, the position in itself, independent of you. And it seems as if this need not be; as if I might and should have more room to breathe, not as a wife, not as your wife, but as a woman. And because a woman must always be the individual, even if she is a wife."

"Does not a man's wife belong to him, Murva?" he asked.

"Oh, surely, dear," answered Murva quickly. "The wife part belongs to him, and the woman part belongs to herself."

"And if the wife and the woman disagree, what then?" he continued.

"Oh, my dear husband!" Murva exclaimed, throwing

her arms around his neck and laying her face against his; "that is just what I am trying to find out!"

Harold laughed, but there was a little uneasiness manifest in his manner as he said, "Well, my dear, I think you are conjuring up some idle fancies into possibly disagreeable realities. But I think you have too much good sense to let them get so far. I cannot see why a man's wife has not got ample room and opportunity to do and be all she should do and be, provided her husband has the sense to appreciate a good wife. Now, Murva, I ask you, in all honesty, what more could you be than you are to-day? What better opportunity could you have? What can you possibly want?"

"I want nothing you can give me, with one exception," answered Murva. "There never was a man more kind, more generous than you. The one only thing I desire is a little more freedom."

Freedom! That was her old cry, he remembered; freedom from bondage. Could she feel her life now a bondage? That was not possible. He felt as if he had better change the subject, get her thoughts into another channel, so he said, "You will have enough to occupy you when Kate is here. She needs a good deal of attention, and you will coddle and pet her most successfully I am sure. You are a staunch friend, Murva," and he stroked her hair soothingly.

"Kate was the only friend I had in the old days when life was so burdensome. And then she was so strong and merry and free. I cannot yet get used to the thought that she will never be so again. The last time I was in Millville she asked me if I had ever seen Haddie Wilson. Someone there had said they had seen her in New York. You did not know her, did you, Harold?"

"No," he replied; "I remember that I heard her spoken of as having left her uncle to other people's mercies shortly before he died. Is it known in Millville how she turned out?"

"There were rumors that she was living the life not mentioned among self-respecting people. And oh, what a pity, Harold, if it is true! She was a very pretty girl, and she did have a hard life then, for she was the sole support of her uncle as well as of herself. I promised him before he died that if it was ever in my power to help and befriend her I would do so."

"That is all right and proper, Murva, so far as financial help is concerned. Provide for her if ever you hear of her and she is in distress, if you choose to do so. But if what is said of her be true, befriending her in the sense of having anything to do with her personally, is quite another matter. My wife can do nothing of the kind," and his tone was firm and decided.

Murva looked at him a little mournfully as he ceased, with the air of having settled the matter for good and all, and said, "I have often thought, Harold, that I should like to befriend some of these women, because, while it is so easy to make the first mistake, it is so hard to make reparation for it. They do not have half a chance, dear, if they desire ever so earnestly to leave that life and lead a different one. Oh, I am sure that many of them would if they could! If someone would only hold out a helping hand; for they cannot do it alone."

"My dear Murva, you do not know what you are talking about. You have no practical knowledge of this class of women, and you are taking the sentimental view of them which all good, pure-hearted women take who have been shielded from contact with them.

While the sentiment is natural and becoming, it is your husband's duty to see that you do not act upon it; and in this matter you must yield to his superior knowledge and judgment."

"How should you know them any better than I do, Harold?" asked Murva quietly.

He nearly, but not quite, gave a slight nervous start, while the colour flamed up over his face and neck for an instant. He looked at her keenly, but she returned his look with the open-eyed candour of a child: and he saw that her question was innocent of all meaning but the one on its surface.

"Men, of necessity, know more of these things than women possibly can, because they are out in the world and come in contact more or less with all there is in it. The guarded and protected life of women keeps them from much knowledge that must inevitably be gained by men. I cannot bear to think of your coming in contact with what I see and know; and there is no need of it. You could do no good by it, and so do not for a moment think of carrying out any such scheme. So far as financial help goes, you can give all you wish to where you think it is really needed; but no quixotic adventures on your own part, if you please."

"I do not wish to do anything I should not, dear," Murva replied gently. "But I have so much time that I might employ in helping others; and it seems as if I had a duty in this respect. I have so much, am so cared for, and there are so many who have so little, who suffer so much, and are so unhappy, and whom I might help to raise up. It seems to me that we all owe something to the world, Harold, to mankind; as if every one of us has a duty to that great whole of which we are a part. And for some reason, I do not know why,

my heart goes out to women especially; to all women, good or bad; because they are women, I suppose, and because I am one of them. Perhaps you and I will not think alike in this matter, Harold."

"In such matters it is the wife's duty to think as her husband thinks, Murva," said her husband decidedly.

"Yes, dear, I suppose so," and she sighed. "But you see that is just what I was trying to tell you of before. It is that which makes me feel so swallowed up, and I want more room to think in. I can't think in you. I must think for myself."

She had got round to her starting-point again, and he saw that she was more in earnest than he had thought. He did not yet see that all this was the workings of a strong individuality which could not be repressed. He saw only his wife—not the woman.

"Well, think where you please and what you please, Murva, if that will satisfy you. But remember that, whenever you act, it is my wife that does so; and that, as I am responsible for what you do, you are never to forget my wishes." And he spoke with an emphasis which was crushing to her half-formed desires resulting from the, at first faint, but now grown strong, strivings within her. But one more effort she must make, that she might be true to herself, and yet she must not wound her husband.

"Harold, my husband, does marriage indeed mean no freedom of thought and action for the wife? Does it absorb the woman to the extinction of individuality? Can she never act as the woman, but ever only accord to her husband's views? Must she always repress herself, that she may be the wife?" And she clasped her hands together tightly with the strength of her feeling, while she looked earnestly in his face.

He moved uneasily in his chair, and Murva felt that in him which caused her to rise from his knee and seat herself by his side, placing one arm tenderly around his neck as she did so.

"I do not know what you mean by repression, Murva," he said. "I should think that the whole matter was very simple and plain. Of course"—and he spoke these words as if they covered the whole ground and no reason was necessary—"when a woman marries there is an end to all action on her part as pertaining to herself alone. As a wife she is bound to consider the views and wishes of her husband and govern her actions accordingly, for she represents him; and she should never forget that for a moment. When a young woman marries she knows or should know that this must be the case; and I do not see why she should not be happy and satisfied if she loves and has confidence in the man she marries. He must know much better than she what is best in all matters outside of her home duties; and trust in his judgment and decision, it seems to me, is a part of her duty as a wife."

As he ceased Murva's arm slid slowly down from his neck, as if without her volition; while she sank back in her chair without replying. Something had come between them. Both felt it, though neither could have given it a name. To him it was sudden and strange. To her it was looking upon something against her will which she had carefully kept out of sight.

She shivered slightly. "You are cold," said he. "I will bring your shawl." And leaving the room he returned quickly with a cloud of fleecy white wool, which he placed carefully around her shoulders. Murva threw back her head against his arm as he did so, resting it there lovingly, while she took his hand in hers and

brought it to her lips, looking at him with a world of tenderness in her eyes.

The slight stiffness in his manner disappeared, as he, in his turn, threw himself upon his knees beside her, and with both arms around her drew her passionately to him and laid his head upon her bosom. "Oh, my darling," he said, "I am satisfied in you. Can you not rest in me?"

The deep underlying protest within her which had to-night, for the first time, found expression, was crowded down and forbidden to show its face. "My husband must be right!" she said to herself. "He is so good, and he must know better than I." She bowed her face and laid her soft cheek upon his hair. Though she spoke no word, he knew her surrender.

Until late that evening they talked of their past, reviewing the circumstances attending their meeting and their betrothal by the rock in the woods.

"I shall never forget how you looked to me then," said he. "Your whole attitude appealed to me as I came in sight of you, although your face was hidden. And when I spoke to you and you rose and looked at me, it was like the face of one who had been called from a long distance and did not know what he had come to meet, while what he had left was yet with him. When you came to me, it seemed as if you stepped down from some high place into my arms and some of the light and radiance up there came with you."

Long after her husband was asleep that night, Murva lay awake and pondered the events of her life. After all the oppression of her girlhood her marriage was like heaven to her. And now after these years when she lacked nothing in externals, when, as she must admit, her husband was devoted to her, there was growing

stronger and stronger a sense of bondage which made her feel guilty. How could she have such a feeling? she asked herself. There must be something wrong in her. Why could she not adapt herself to the pattern which was held up as what a wife should be? Why should there be any inward rebellion when she looked upon it? What was it that was required of her? Nothing but what was required of all wives because they are such, and granted by them for the same reason. Surely she was no different from her kind, and should not separate herself from it by a resistance which would only make her more "peculiar" than she had always been.

"I must put these thoughts away," she said to herself, "and be what he wishes me to be. It is only his due."

"What is due to yourself?" something persisted within her. But she closed her ears and refused to hear. A woman, brave and steadfast in the midst of condemnation, because she was true to her higher instincts, rose before her. But she closed her eyes and refused to see. "A little more slumber. A little more folding of the hands to sleep."

CHAPTER XVIII.

KATE CRAWFORD and her husband had been Murva's guests for a week. In the days immediately following her wedding anniversary she had fought many a silent battle.

A woman's first duty is to her husband. That is both the written and the unwritten law underlying our social organisation. Our mothers and grandmothers were governed by it, and it is a sacred law through custom as well as by promulgation.

Again and again Murva used these arguments to convince herself that she must follow sacred custom as the oracle which spoke with divine voice; and again and again she silenced her protests, thinking at the moment that she was convinced. She succeeded in repressing all appearance of her inward struggles, smothered the inward cry for freedom as an individual, rebuked the rebellion of the woman against the wife, so that her face bore no sign of these. And her husband rejoiced that her uneasiness—for he could not understand Murva's feelings and words sufficiently to give them a more truthful name—had passed by harmlessly, and she was as she always had been.

One would not have recognised the Kate of the old days, the impetuous, warm-hearted, quick-tongued girl who had so warmly championed Murva's cause. She

was thin and white and weak, slower of speech, quiet in manner, while a pathetic expression to her slender figure and in her eyes roused the sympathy of all who saw her.

Dr. Crawford had grown somewhat older in appearance than seven years would seem to warrant, while in his dark hair showed many a white one. But his voice and the clasp of his hand as Murva bade him welcome, were unchanged, unless they conveyed even more than formerly the sense of strength and support.

During the first days of her visit, Murva had noticed a certain mournfulness with Kate which touched her sympathetic heart, and she had endeavoured to find the cause for it. She found that Kate felt herself a burden to her husband because of her invalid condition, and had come to look upon death as the only release. Something else vague and indefinable, had been suggested to her by Kate's words, which made her uneasy for her friend; and she had set herself vigorously to interest and amuse her, that she might draw her thoughts into other channels.

On this afternoon Kate was resting in her own room, under orders from her physician-husband to so prepare for her journey home the next day. They had been talking of Murva's father, who still continued in the same helpless condition which had come upon him at the time of her marriage. Dr. Crawford had told her that his strength was gradually failing.

He might have told her, but he did not, that Nicholas Kroom had already reaped, in some measure, after his own sowing; for he was entirely dependent upon his wife, whose love for him—never a deep and earnest one at the best—had been so battered by the assaults made upon it in the days of his enforced despotism,

that she had become the tyrant in her turn. And while she gave him the physical care essential to his condition, she did not scruple to give her tongue free rein or to show him that, at last, she had got her own way and meant to follow it as she pleased. He had recovered, in a very slight degree, the power of motion and of speech. He could move his head, and, very feebly, one side of his body; could articulate a few words which close attention could render intelligible enough to be understood. But with these exceptions he was a prisoner, bound and chained to his own thoughts for companions, barred out from the companionship of his kind—for he had never made for himself friends who would remember him in his affliction—and even from the air and sunlight which were free to the poorest outcasts. Despot by nature, he was now ruled by a stronger than he; and in his captivity his former subjects triumphed over him.

Murva would have gladly removed him to her own home and shared her stepmother's ministrations, but Mrs. Kroom did not wish this. She was not comfortable with Murva, and preferred to remain where she was. Murva's husband objected also. He did not want—and naturally—to have his home invaded in such wise, and did not feel that his wife owed her father any such action. With his usual liberality where money was concerned, he had said, "Do for him all you please in this way, and go to see him once in a while; but no more than this. It is all that is required of you."

So Murva had made periodical visits to Millville, when she had remained with the Meltons and gone to her father's house for an hour or two daily. It was more tomb-like than ever, and while she was sincerely sorry for her father, and anxious to do all in her power

for him, he never seemed to have forgiven her, and, in his silent way, made her feel the fact. She derived no pleasure from these visits, except that which comes from doing one's duty the best one knows how; but she had been enabled to keep up her close friendship with Kate.

"I cannot feel sorrowful, Kate, over what Donald tells me," she said. "Why should my father continue to live, dragging out an existence which is more death than life? In the beyond, whatever it may be, there must be a freedom denied him here."

Kate looked at her with a peculiar expression, as she replied, "Yes, there are cases where the beyond is the better, both for those who go to it and for those who remain here. Release for the one is release for others."

Murva felt a meaning in Kate's reply which was applicable to herself; and she saw that the feeling manifested on her arrival had not been eradicated, but only covered over for the time being. The hopelessness permeating Kate's words touched all her ready sympathies and made her desire to get to the bottom of its cause. What was friendship for, if it was not to be the means of needed helpfulness?

"My precious Kate, aren't you just the least little bit ashamed of yourself, to talk about release through death? For you are thinking of yourself, I know. Only see what a difference there is between you and my father! He is bound a prisoner to the same four walls year after year, while you are able to go about and——"

"Oh, Murva, I did not mean that! I know, in comparison to your father, I am free. It was not a release for myself I was thinking of so much as for others. My husband is too good a man and too valuable to the

world at large to be dwarfed himself and hindered in what his abilities would lead him to by a wife who is no wife."

"Why, Kate dear, how can you say that you are no wife!" And Murva drew her chair close to her friend's couch. "Don't you know that Donald would rather have you, fragile as you are, than any other woman in the wide world? That you are more to him than any other woman could possibly be? That he loves, with all his strong manly heart, every hair of your dear little head? Why, there is not another woman on earth more cherished as the greatest treasure possible to be possessed than you are! If you were to be taken from Donald it would spoil his life, Kate; I know it."

"Oh, Murva," cried Kate. "I know my husband loves me deeply. How can I help but know it with all these years of untiring and ceaseless devotion which he has shown me? And of course he would suffer bitterly; but all the same it would be better for both of us if I can never be more of a wife to him in the future than I have been in the past," and the tears which had been gathering in her eyes began to roll slowly down her cheeks.

"Kate, darling," said Murva, taking her friend's hand tenderly, "you are a constant inspiration to your husband. He is all the more able to enter into the feelings of others wherever he goes, to be the sympathising friend as well as the physician, the one whom all will look to for help and encouragement, sick and well alike, because of you. That association but makes him the more tender and considerate, for he will know the better how to feel for others, as those who have no painful experiences themselves never can. His life with you, Kate, is a part of his education, a portion of that train-

ing which but fits him the better for his appointed work as a helper of mankind; and many an one whom he has served owes that most helpful element in his ministrations to you. Through him, dear, weak as you are, you are doing a work in the world which is of untold value. You are his ministering spirit, sending him forth consecrated to the fulfilling of his mission. Oh, Kate dear, you should be happy, for you are a blessed woman!"

As Murva's voice ceased, it was almost as if a benediction had been pronounced. Her face was rapt, and her eyes had that far-off look which Kate remembered of old; while that inward light seemed to shine through her features till Kate was awed as if by the presence of something holy, and could not take her eyes from Murva's face. "And his face was as the face of an angel," she said to herself. She could not, as formerly, call to her friend laughingly to "Come back!" She could only wait.

Little by little Murva's gaze came back to her visible surroundings and rested upon her friend, as she continued playfully, "Indeed, Kate, I do not believe that you half realise what a fortunate woman you are!"

"Your words are very comforting, Murva," replied Kate. "I am thankful if I can feel that I am of some use and help to my husband without deceiving myself. I have felt so utterly useless, so worse than useless, such a drag and hindrance, instead of the helpmeet which a wife should be, that I have been not only willing but anxious to have him relieved of it. And even if what you say is true, and from the bottom of my heart I hope it is, the fact remains that, in a most essential particular—I can speak freely to you, Murva, dear, because we have known each other so long—I have

never been, and probably never shall be a wife to my husband."

And she bowed her head upon Murva's hands, which she held in her own, while a sob shook her slender frame.

Murva felt as if she were suddenly snatched out of light and warmth and beauty and joy, and thrust into darkness, where it was cold and noisome, and she could not see her way—where dismal shadows pressed upon her, and wild distorted faces leered at her, while she shudderingly recoiled from, she knew not what; it was too dark to see. But Kate's sorrow was very real, as her hot tears upon Murva's hands testified; and she desired more than ever to comfort her. But she shrank from the idea presented to her in Kate's words. It could not be.

"Kate, dear! tell me plainly what you mean. Is it physical incapacity simply?"

Kate raised her head and nodded assent, laying it back again wearily upon the cushions.

"Well, what of that!" burst from Murva. She felt, all at once, such a surging rebellion within her as almost frightened her. Her heart beat rapidly, and her breath came and went quickly as she proceeded, the words pouring from her as if they uttered themselves: "Why should that make any difference? Surely a woman is so much more to her husband, so much above that plane, that such a deficiency is the very least possible! Why should a thought or a regret be given to anything of so little account? Happiness does not depend upon physical requirements: its support and substance lies far above these; and the one you speak of has no voice, can have no voice in determining what husband and wife shall be to each other. That is not the essence of marriage, it has nothing to do with it.

It is of that lower order which has the least place in true marriage, for that is a unity of two beings on a plane far above the physical. Oh, surely, the absence of that association which is sanctioned only by marriage cannot affect it; cannot make it an empty nothing, as if that association were the essential all. Oh, no, no, Kate; that is not so. You have no reason to shed a tear for any such cause. It is the woman of you, not the physical body, which is the wife, and which your husband holds as such. What does the rest amount to?"

And as Murva paused, her bosom heaving with the feeling which was pictured on her face in a lofty scorn of the possibilities suggested by Kate's words, she looked the champion of that womanhood which through ignorance of its own nature, was bound captive to its mistakes. She did not herself understand why she was so wrought up at the view of the position revealed by Kate's confidences. She was all feeling, without knowing at the moment why; the wherefore was to come afterwards. But all she was, her whole being to its extremest depths, was in revolt against the implied possibilities.

"Oh, Murva," answered Kate, with a mournful expression, as Murva ceased looking at her, "this deficiency does amount to a very great deal all the same. No man can be satisfied with a wife who is unable to minister to all his requirements. Only a man as good as my Donald would bear the position uncomplainingly as he does. A marriage which lacks this consummation must be a burden instead of a satisfactory union. Whether we women like to acknowledge the fact or not, it is the fact nevertheless; and, because I know this, I feel as if my heart was slowly breaking."

Murva looked at her a moment in silence, and noted, as she had not before, the appearance of gradual wearing out which Kate's face and form portrayed. Could it be possible that sorrow over this incapacity of hers was slowly killing Kate? It was monstrous!

"Kate dear, don't you know that a wife is something too holy to be placed on this level? I do not believe that Donald feels as you seem to think he does for one minute!" she said emphatically.

"It is of no use ignoring natural laws, Murva!" said Kate hopelessly. "A man's nature is different from a woman's, and women are compelled to recognise this fact. The best man that ever lived could not remain content, feeling no deprivation, in a union which lacked completeness. If he could, he would be a god, and gods do not mingle with men nowadays. I think my husband is far above the average man because he never complains. But, of course, when a man is cheated of his dues through no fault of his own, he is justified in making up the deficiency." And an added shade of hopeless sorrow was in Kate's face as she said this.

"Kate! Kate!" exclaimed Murva, "you never can mean that—that—you believe your husband is unfaithful to you?"

"In spirit, No!—in the letter, Yes! How can he help it?" answered Kate.

Murva sank helplessly back in her chair. She felt as if her very breath was taken from her, such was the shock Kate's words gave her. As their full meaning was borne in upon her, words for the moment failed her. What she felt could not be put into words. It seemed to her as if marriage itself was tottering to its ruin if its chief bulwark was physical association. But,

no! This could not be so. Kate was self-deceived through her own morbid fancies, begotten of her long illness. It was not possible that a man could be unfaithful to his wife even in the letter, as Kate phrased it, when she was all to him that it was possible for her to be; when it was no fault, but a misfortune, if she were unable to meet all the requirements of marriage, and where the one in which she fell short was the very least of these! What could she do to help Kate to see that she was mistaken? For of course she was mistaken.

"Kate dear, have you any other reason for thinking that your husband has overstepped the bounds of strict marital fidelity. Is not this solely your own supposition?" she asked.

"I suppose it must be called supposition," replied Kate, "so far as any evidence goes; for I have none except the knowledge of a married woman that certain consequences are inevitable in the marriage relation because of the nature of the man. But this is enough for me, and would be all sufficient for any other married woman, I should suppose. Nature is stronger than we are, and what is the use of shutting our eyes to the fact? A man's love is not of the kind which excludes the physical element, though, of course, an innocent young girl does not understand this, and her dreams of married life have to be modified after marriage to meet its conditions. Do you not know through your own experience, Murva, that this is so?"

Murva nodded assent, and Kate went on.

"I suppose I have thought of these things more and seen more clearly the inevitable, because my husband is a physician. What I have heard him say when he has spoken of others, of general facts and laws, shows

that these must apply equally to himself and to me. We can be no exception to the rest of mankind. That result which is unavoidable for others under certain conditions must be as sure for us under like conditions; and because, as I said before, nature is too much for us. So what is there left but submission?"

"Submission!" echoed Murva, starting to her feet, and pacing rapidly up and down the room "No! and every time, No! Submission to the decree that that part of a man's nature which is on the level of the brutes is stronger than the rest of it, and therefore rules all, I for one cannot and will not yield even by assent. It is not so, it cannot be so. Every instinct in me revolts against it. And, Kate, I believe you are wrong; that you are needlessly making yourself miserable."

Kate smiled, as if with the patience of superior knowledge.

"Such perfect devotion to a wife I never saw as Donald bestows upon you. How could he, by any possibility, approach another woman in any way that belongs by right only to his wife? I cannot believe that the animal nature in him or in anyone who is worthy to be called a man, can be so all-powerful as to rule over the higher instincts and keep them in slavery; for if what you think is true, this noble king of the earth that we call man is but the merest slave, and should be dethroned and uncrowned."

"Oh, Murva!" exclaimed Kate, as Murva paused for a moment, looking as if with her own hand the dethroning and uncrowning could and should be accomplished; "I know all you can say, I have felt all that you feel, for in my years of weakness I have been able to do little else than go over the ground again and again.

And I tell you, with all our feelings and convictions that this should not be so, facts are too strong for us. There is no getting away from them. The position of woman with man cannot be independent of this relation and be satisfactory to him. He is not so constituted, and we women have to give up our ideals for hard facts. How much happier our sex would be if women would only stop creating ideals for themselves which actualities can but shatter and destroy!"

"Kate, my ideals shall not be shattered and destroyed!" said Murva, ceasing suddenly her rapid walk, and vigorous and concentrated determination spoke in every feature of her face. "I will hold to them so unceasingly as to preserve them, whatever comes. Why, you might as well take away a woman's breath as take away her ideals. How could she live without them? They are a part of her very being. I know and feel this, and mine shall be preserved to me. I will contend with the contradictory facts to the last atom of strength I possess."

"You will get dreadfully shaken and bruised, dear," said Kate quietly.

"That does not matter if I win," rejoined Murva quickly. "And I will win. But let that pass now. The immediate consideration is yourself. I cannot bear to think of your returning home with this consuming sorrow in your heart, eating your life away, and nothing done to destroy it. What can I do? This must not be!"

"You can do nothing, Murva," returned Kate, "because nothing can be done. To accept the inevitable is all there is for me; and I am unceasingly thankful that my husband is the man he is. Think what a horrible torture life with one less kind and noble than he

would be under such conditions! I know that he loves me, inefficient as I am. That no other woman receives or could receive from him what he lavishes in such full measure upon me. Whatever his acts, they are compelled by his necessities, not prompted by the feeling which belongs to me alone. Seeing this clearly, helped to the seeing by the revelations which are mine as the wife of a physician, I accept my lot, hoping that the time will not be long before my husband is released and free to find for himself that fuller union which is denied him with me."

"But, Kate," interrupted Murva, "Donald could not marry again. If one loves once, one loves for always."

Kate shook her head. "This may be true of a woman," she said, "because this accords with her ideal; but it is not true of a man, for his love is not like hers. There is this element in a man's love which I do not believe is missing in one single exception; and, with most self-respecting men, marriage is the honourable means by which its demands are met. Because it is so strong an element they can remarry readily, for they can feel enough affection for another woman, even if they have loved one devotedly, to put her in the same position and be happy with her. Though they may feel a lack with a second wife because of the experience with the first, or because she met more fully higher demands, these occupy second place; and, the ruling element being met and satisfied, they will go through life more contented men than they would be if the reverse were the case."

As Murva listened to Kate, who spoke now with the calmness of that conviction which is forced into the place belonging to contrary inclination, her heart grew

heavy, and she felt that, with all her desire to lift her friend out of her sorrow, it was not, at present, possible. While she was compelled to recognise a certain truth in what Kate said, she felt that it could not be wholly true, and she resolved that she would not rest till she had found a way to show her friend wherein and how she was mistaken in her conclusions.

"Well, Kate dear!" she said finally, "if what you believe is true—and mind you, I do not believe that it is—you can still be thankful that, viewing the matter as you do, you can respect your husband, nevertheless, and because you feel that he is worthy of respect. I can imagine no fate more dreadful than for a woman to be compelled to live the life of a wife to a man whom she cannot respect, and therefore for whom it is impossible she can have any love. Donald is above reproach, honoured and loved by all who know him."

They heard the street door open and voices in the hall below.

"There they are now!" exclaimed Murva, "and you have had no rest this afternoon. I will run down to them, while you try to brighten up, Kate dear, so Donald will not see that you have been crying. I had no idea it was so late." And pressing her lips to Kate's cheek with a "Now, do your best!" she went quickly downstairs.

Kate succeeded so well that beyond saying to her husband she had been too nervous and restless to sleep, no farther explanation was necessary: and the evening passed for them as pleasantly as usual. While Harold Deering was entertaining Kate with some graphic views of New York politicians as they appeared to him, Donald said in a low tone to Murva, "I have seen John Wilson's niece this afternoon."

"Oh, tell me all about it, Donald!" she replied quickly.

"She is in the —— hospital. I did not recognise her at first, but as I passed by her on my way through the ward she called me by name. I stopped and talked with her for a few moments and told her of her uncle's death. I think she already knew of it, though she said little. She seemed to want to learn what she could from me without giving any information about herself. I heard from the attendants that she had no visitors, but that her expenses had been paid regularly and she would soon be discharged, as she was convalescing."

"Do you think, Donald," asked Murva, in a still lower tone, with a glance at her husband, "that she has been leading an immoral life?"

"She gave me that impression," he answered briefly.

Morning found Kate and her husband ready for their return home. With promises of a return in the future, good-byes were said, and they departed, she with the gnawing sorrow which she kept covered from her husband, he ready for his daily duties again.

Murva looked after them as they drove away, thinking to herself—"It cannot be true. She must be helped, but I wonder how I shall accomplish it."

CHAPTER XIX.

"HAROLD, do you believe a man could ever be unfaithful to his wife if he really loved her?"

Harold Deering looked sharply at Murva as she asked this question. They had been talking of a case of marital infidelity, to which the daily press had devoted a very liberal amount of space on account of the social prominence of the parties involved. She spoke very earnestly and seriously, looking at him meanwhile with that direct gaze so characteristic of her. He moved about a little in his chair, as he answered,

"Why, no, of course not! Why do you ask?"

"I mean under any circumstances, Harold, even if he were disappointed because of conditions that could not be controlled," she continued, without changing her gaze. He rose from his seat and poked the fire in the grate.

"What conditions? What do you mean?" he asked.

"Well, suppose the wife, through no fault of her own, became unable to be to her husband what she was formerly. Could any deficiency on her part justify what is ordinarily termed unfaithfulness?"

He seated himself again, as he answered, "It seems to me, my dear, that you ask a positive and absolute answer where only a relative one is possible. What has induced this voyage of discovery on your part?"

"I do not know that there is anything to discover so far as my views are concerned, Harold. But I want to know what you think, and through you what other men think, for I suppose one man's ideas fairly represent those of the majority. Of course I hope you will agree with me, but I want to hear you say it."

He saw she was very much in earnest and, remembering their former conversation, he did not feel quite easy as to the outcome of the present one. He had noticed that his wife had been unusually silent and preoccupied in the few days which had elapsed since the departure of their friends; had observed that she was not quite so responsive to his every word and look as usual, and that she had seemed to be pondering something intently. There had grown with him a vague sense of far-offness on his wife's part since that memorable evening, which he had hardly acknowledged even to himself, so undefined and intangible was it. He felt now that it would be wise to answer cautiously, as there was no knowing what new tendency she might manifest; and he was faintly conscious that it was just a little uncomfortable in consequence, when his wife did too much individual thinking. He really wished she wouldn't; but he must answer her.

"Unfaithfulness is a pretty broad term," he said, "though in its common application it is narrowed to one meaning. I think very few men are really unfaithful to their wives in proportion to those who have provocation so to be. But I really do not see, Murva, why you are following this subject. It can have no special interest to you."

"Yes, it has, Harold. Any subject which so nearly concerns the happiness of men and women must have a special interest for me. We cannot be shut

out entirely from the lives of others. We are too closely related to the whole human body not to have a vital interest in all that concerns it. And it seems to me that I am only lately waking up to this fact, and have a deal of lost time to make up."

She smiled, and nodded her head at him as he looked at her with rather a troubled expression in his eyes.

"Now I want to know if men would consider themselves justified, when their wives fall short of what is considered their full duty, through inability to perform it, in a course of conduct which, without this fact, would be considered reprehensible."

"I suppose men generally look upon these things somewhat differently from women, Murva," he said at last. "Their natures are different"—Murva started at this echo of Kate's words—"and one cannot be judged by the same rules which are fair to the other. There could be circumstances under which a man might overstep the strict letter of the law of marital faithfulness without being really unfaithful to his wife in spirit. And this would be considered reprehensible by those unable to take into account the fundamental difference in the two natures, but justifiable by those who do. Sentiment would be shocked, but reason would be satisfied; and according as these predominated in the individual, would the verdict be."

He did not like to answer his wife thus. He felt as if it was unwise, but the words seemed to be drawn out of him in spite of himself. Why could she not let such things alone?

"Which would be the justifiable circumstances, Harold?" persisted Murva quietly.

"Well, if a woman did not treat her husband as he had a right to expect of her; did not make a home for

him, but made him wretched instead, many would think him not to blame if he consoled himself elsewhere."

"But we are not speaking of such cases as these, you know," continued Murva. "Only of those where no blame can possibly attach to the wife."

"Well, physical incapacity on her part would be considered justifiable cause," he answered reluctantly.

"Even if she were entirely blameless and was a perfect helpmeet for every other need of the husband's nature?" she went on.

"Why how can there but be a great lack when this is the case," he replied in a defensive tone, for something which he felt in his wife impelled him to defence of the position. "There cannot be a complete and satisfactory married life when this all-important element is left out, through inability on either side to meet its demands."

"How about mastery of them, Harold?" asked his wife in a peculiarly distinct tone.

"Mastery!" he repeated in surprise. "You do not know what you are talking about, Murva. Physical needs are imperative, and health depends upon their gratification. Ask any physician, and he will tell you that this is so. If these needs cannot be met with with one's wife what is a man going to do?"

Murva was silent. She was conscious of a cold, sickening disgust growing within her. It seemed as if a blight had fallen upon everything; as if the world was upside down. Was this the all-important value of the wife? She was roused by her husband's voice.

"If a man, being impelled by his necessities, seeks that which his wife is unable to afford, and because he must, she is in nowise wronged thereby. She is de-

frauded of nothing, for her husband's love for her is very different from any feeling he may bestow elsewhere. But I do not see why you should pursue this subject. There is nothing to be gained by it, and no need of it. We, fortunately, have no such experience. You are the dearest wife that a man ever had, my darling! Come and sit on my knee!" And he held out his hand to her.

Murva rose and came to him, but not as impulsively as formerly. He even thought he saw a slight hesitation in her manner. She continued unusually silent, although he exerted himself to interest her; but with all his efforts she was not as responsive as usual. A sudden thought struck him.

"Had you any particular married pair in mind to-night, Murva?" he asked her.

Murva could not betray her friend's confidence, even to her husband. Neither could she tell him how his every word had been an echo of Kate's, and had fallen with a sickening, crushing weight upon her which she knew would bring rebellion when the present mental numbness caused by it had passed.

"I found myself wondering over these matters and doubtless Kate's visit here started the train of thought. She is such a feeble little woman; but, oh! how much to her husband in spite of that. And he is such a noble man."

"That he is," assented her husband heartily. "And the very personification of devotion. He thinks of nothing, not even of his professional duties and researches, I verily believe, without considering how they will affect her through the demands upon him. Mrs. Kate is one of the luckiest women on earth, and I hope she realises the fact."

Murva remembered the carefully-hidden sorrow which was Kate's constant companion, and thought to herself that there was, truly, a very great difference in the way men and women viewed these things; and she supposed wearily, that each was but following the individual nature, and could not help it.

She rose from his knee, and made the adjustment of a table cover which had been dragged awry seem the excuse for doing so. She did not return, but seated herself at a little distance as she began to speak of some matters relating to his business on which he had voluntarily conferred with her a few days before; and she did not refer to her former subject for the remainder of the evening.

As they went upstairs, later, to their own room, Harold put his hand under his wife's arm with a lifting motion as he said, "Your step is not as light to-night as usual, Murva. Are you not well?"

"Perfectly, dear," she replied gently. "I have one of my quiet moods, I suppose. I always was peculiar, you know," and she smiled faintly.

Manlike, her husband could not understand how she should feel differently this evening from what she usually did if there was no cause for it; and set it down to women's ways," for the best of them had them, he said to himself. But he also set himself to cheer her up with kisses and caresses; and they roused in Murva a feeling new to her, one that almost frightened her. Could it be that she did not want him to kiss and caress her? Her own husband who was dearer to her than all the world beside? That these were unwelcome instead of precious as formerly?

She tried to banish the feeling, to reason herself out of it, as she lay by his side. It could not be that she

loved him less? Oh! no! no! That was not so! But there was a new element in her feeling toward him. What did it mean? She wished he would cease, would leave her to herself. She felt bound and cramped in some way, and there was no response to them in her. She moved uneasily away from him, but he only became the more demonstrative, gathering her into his arms and holding her so tightly she could scarcely stir, showering kisses upon her lips, and neck, and bosom, murmuring in a low tone, "My darling! My love!"

There was that in his touch to-night which made her shudder inwardly. And yet the difference must be in her, not in him, she reasoned. He was only showing his love for her. Love! Was this wild passion which was increasing every moment, and which held her fast in a palpitating grasp, breathing a hot turbulent breath upon her so that she was half suffocated, love? Was this almost ferocity the expression of love? Was there anything divine or lasting in this feeling which would soon exhaust itself by its own intensity? This ferocious thing was not a man, but an animal, and it *loved* her!

A tumult began to rage within her which she could not control. She was possessed by the desire to break loose from him, from this creature which was not her husband, was not what she loved. She could not bear it! There was something unholy, something revolting about it. She struggled in his arms, struggled so determinedly that she broke from him and sprang from the bed, panting with the excess of feeling roused in her, seeking blindly to escape from something horrible to her, and frightened, both at her own desire and her impulsive act.

She stood in the middle of the room, the dim night-

light showing her white-robed form against the dark background of shadows, as if she were halted there in her impetuous flight, conscious only of a wild resolve to get away from something hateful to her.

Her husband raised himself to a sitting posture, and stared at her in amazement.

"What is the matter with you, Murva? Are you ill?" he demanded.

"No! Yes! I—don't know!" she answered in a choked and stifled voice. "I feel strangely. I want to be by myself. I—let me go to another room for to-night, Harold. I must be alone."

"You must be alone!" he repeated, more astonished than ever. "Why, what do you mean?"

"I am not really ill, Harold, and yet I do not feel quite myself, so I will sleep alone to-night, if you do not mind." And she moved toward the door.

"You will do nothing of the kind," he answered in a hard, determined voice which stopped her with her hand upon the door-knob. "If there is anything the matter, tell me what it is plainly. I do not understand your actions."

She stood still where she was, bewildered and frightened by inward promptings and by the tone of her husband's voice. She could feel that he was looking at her with a new and strange expression, though in the dim light she could hardly see his face. He waited a moment. She did not move, and made no reply, and he continued.

"Your place is here, and I shall not consent to your leaving it till you give me some good and sufficient reason for doing so."

Shall not consent? Had she really no right to be by herself without her husband's consent? Was this what

marriage meant? Her hand fell from the door, and she leaned against it for support. It seemed as if revelation after revelation was coming to her beyond her strength to meet. She was a wife, and she must go back to her place, whatever her individual inclination might be. She moved slowly toward the bed and sat down upon it. She felt strangely weak, and she shivered from head to foot.

"Come, lie down, Murva," said her husband, in a mollified voice. "You will take cold." And he drew her down beside him, and covered her with the bedclothes.

CHAPTER XX.

THE following morning as Murva and her husband were seated at the breakfast-table, a servant entered with a telegram which had just arrived.

"Your father is failing rapidly. You had better come at once.

"CRAWFORD."

She handed it to her husband after she had read it, saying, "We will go in the noon train, will we not, Harold?"

"You can go then, certainly," he replied, "but I must follow you later if necessary. I cannot leave my business so suddenly, but will arrange matters so as to come at once if anything happens. Now do not exert yourself too much, I do not believe you are quite well," —she was unusually pale and heavy-eyed this morning —"but let Ann pack whatever is necessary to be taken with you. You do not feel particularly unhappy over this news, do you, my dear? You knew it was liable to come at any time."

"No, Harold. If I am honest I must say that I feel no grief over the prospect of my father's death, for what has his life been during the last seven years but a worse than death? And I have never had the love for

him that is usually bestowed upon a father. How could I? It was never called up in me."

"How could you indeed!" rejoined her husband. "Men do not realise what they are doing when they make tyrants of themselves. I thank heaven that I was the means of taking you out of that bondage, my darling! You would have died before this if you had remained in it."

"I think I should have freed myself some time," replied Murva, very gently.

"Well, I must be off," said he, as they rose from the table. "Make your preparations with as little exertion as possible, and I will return in time to take you to the station."

He kissed her good-bye—he never left her without doing so—and Murva placed herself at the window where she could watch him till he turned the corner, as was her invariable custom. Then she went to attend to her duties, feeling that her inclination to remain quiet must not be indulged. She experienced an unusual solicitude as to her household, that all its details might be faultless, and that in what belonged to her own personal supervision there might be nothing lacking.

Not till she found herself in the moving train, everything carefully attended to at home, and her husband had taken leave of her with the promise to follow her shortly, did she seem able to review the events of the last twenty-four hours which had been waiting her attention under all the immediate action incidental to her going away. Some of the repulsion which she had felt the preceding night, and which had then sprung into existence, as if the visible birth of something previously hidden, clung to her still.

There was a new element in her thought of her

husband, something which, as yet, she did not understand and could only feel. It was a fact to her consciousness, though her reason could not now supply the why and wherefore for it. But her natural probing tendency began to exercise itself to this end. She reviewed their conversation of the previous evening, and now she could see that since Kate's disclosure she had had, way down in the bottom of her heart, covered from sight, a fear that what her friend had declared as the inevitable consequence of a man's nature might be true, might be a fact that must be recognised, however much her own higher instincts might reject and turn from it. Her seven years' experience of married life had been all that could be desired, according to the common verdict. And yet, at their expiration there had broken from her a protest which her husband could not understand, and which, she now saw, most men would not understand, if he was a fair example of the rest.

Why was there this protest? Why had she been impelled, almost against her will, to give utterance to what had been slowly growing within her during these seven really happy years? For she was not unhappy! She had no reason to be so. All that a kind, loving and indulgent husband could be and do had been her portion. But, as she had said to him, she felt "swallowed up" and something in her, something which could not be satisfied with the care and affection bestowed upon a loved and valuable prisoner, had risen up and asserted its claims. It had spoken from her even while she felt half frightened and more than half wicked because of it, had spoken because it could not remain silent, and it had clamoured ever since, even though for a time she had turned from it and refused to hear it: clamoured

for its rights, demanded that recognition which would alone satisfy it and silence its voice.

It was the "I" of her which could not be content as the adjunct of the husband, which, because of what it was, could not be absorbed utterly in the wife who was only that adjunct; which protested and protested, till from the first faint whisperings its voice had grown loud and strong and filled her ears with its din. And what a senseless fighting of ghosts it was, reason told her, speaking for men and women in general, representing the view of the situation which would be theirs. Other's would say "What is it that you want? How can you possibly desire more than you have, except perhaps it be children? You have an elegant home, a kind husband, all the money you want, an influential position in society if you choose to have it. What in the name of common sense do you seek further?"

And as this arraignment rose before her the old cry sprang to her lips, "I seek freedom from bondage!"

"Bondage! You in bondage!" laughed a chorus of voices. "Why you are as free as it is possible for a woman to be. What would you do if your husband was a Turk, and you were shut up in a harem cage? Then you might complain, but not now!"

Ah! but there is more than one way of keeping a prisoner. She had stood at a window of her house one day which overlooked the garden of a neighbor. A boy had a bird fastened to a post in the ground, by means of a string tied around one of its legs. The bird was out of doors, in the air and sunlight; was fed and tended carefully, for the boy loved it dearly. It had a chance to fly, of course. It would be cruel to deprive the bird of the opportunity. But with all this

loving forethought and care the bird seemed to regard the boy as an enemy. Strange, when he was so fond of it! It would spread its little wings and fly only to be pulled back by the cruel string. So far and no farther. But it was the string that was cruel and not the boy. He only took care of his own.

When it had flown as far as it could and was brought back to the ground struggling and beating its little wings uselessly, it would rest for a moment, panting helplessly, only to make a new effort when the boy sought to caress it, sought to show it that he loved it. And the boy looked at it as if he would say, "Poor little thing! Why do you not know better? I only want to love you, and what are you afraid of?"

Another effort, and again the bird would crouch helplessly on the ground, and all the while it had wings which were made for flying, yet the boy wondered why it should do so; wondered why it should act like the bird it was; wondered why it could not be content with him. And the little bird, struggling to use its own, use that which was a part of itself, use the wings which were made to fly with, use them according to their nature and to its own as a bird, wondered why it was hindered from mounting up to where it belonged, and could not see, because it suffered, that the boy loved it.

Ah! the cruel string! It was the bird's enemy and the boy's enemy as well, even while he thought it his friend because it kept the bird his own.

The boy left the bird, and ran up and down in the garden, free to go where he would, while the bird remained fast where it was. But he was a boy, and it was only a bird. And all the while it had wings, but it could not get away from the string. What were its

wings worth if it could not use them? It had them! Yes. But it was as if they were not, and all because of the cruel string.

If he would only loose it, and let the bird go! she had thought as she stood at the window. Then the bird, being free and not frightened, would learn to love the boy, would come at his call, and perch on his shoulder and eat from his hand. How much better that would be! she had said as she turned from the window.

But now she saw why the bird was kept a prisoner. The cruel string which kept it so, which let it fly to be sure, but only so far, was the nature of the boy. He was not to blame for being a boy, and for acting according to the nature of a boy. Of course he would seek to hold that which he desired, and how could he understand that what he loved should fear him when he was only trying to show it that he did love? How could he see that the string, the boy nature, was the mutual enemy? Did he loose it, he would lose his bird. How could he see that, so loosed, it might come back to him, drawn by a stronger bond than the old one?

His boy eyes could not see so far! And the boy could not change his nature—could not even see that with him there was anything to be changed! But he could see that the bird ought to change—ought to stop flying away from him, and rest content under his caressing hand! And yet where he thought he saw he was really blind! For did not the bird in flying act according to its own nature, too? And how could it help it?

Oh, it was a pity for both! For the boy and for the bird! Each was true to its nature, and what could be done? Were the string suddenly cut and the bird

loosed, the boy would suffer, because he could understand nothing but that he had lost what he loved. But he would grow! Ah!

A revelation broke upon her: *He would grow!* Because of what he was, he could not always remain a boy; and when he was older he would see that that which gave the boy pain was the means of a greater delight to the man. For the bird, untrammeled, free to use its wings, and fearless because of its unchecked freedom, would come to the man while it would flee from the boy; and because the man, as the higher nature grown from the boy, could recognize the nature and necessities of the bird, could understand that the first of these is freedom.

She began to see why she had this instinctive longing within her which was accompanied by the passionate, though at most times silent, protest against what she felt to be a bondage; one so subtle as to appear to be freedom. It was the prompting to use the wings which were a part of herself. It is not the nature of a bird to rest contentedly upon the ground where the boy is satisfied.

And there was no fault to be found with her husband. He was not to blame. It was the present man-nature, to which marriage gave the opportunity of tying the string round the leg of the bird: and if the bird strained the string in its efforts to act out its own nature and seek that which is ever above the ground, of course the man would cry out because he could understand only that he was hurt and was in danger of losing his own. She must wait for her husband to grow out of this boyhood into true manhood.

Murva sat wrapt and absorbed as the train rolled on hour after hour, taking no note of time in the preoc-

cupation of her mind by this all-absorbing subject. She could dimly discern that her repulsion of yesterday was but the natural recoil from that love according to the man nature which, to her, was not love but bondage: one that held the wife fast in a relentless grasp which she riveted with a sense of duty till the impulse within her should grow strong enough to compel the spreading of her wings. And all women were held in it, some consciously, others unconsciously, these waking to the fact only when the instinctive trying of their wings brought the tug upon the string: and then, in their fear, they began to look upon the one who had tied it as their enemy. Her old question, asked of her friend, "What is marriage?" marriage itself was beginning to answer after seven years.

Suddenly she awoke to the fact that it was growing dark, and she must be nearing her journey's end. Soon the lights of Millville were in sight and when she stepped from the train at the station Dr. Crawford came forward to meet her.

"How is my father?" was her first question.

"About the same," answered Donald. "He has held his own to-day and he may hold out for a few days longer. Let me take you first to our home, and after you have had some supper I will go with you there."

Kate and her parents gave Murva their usual warm greeting. She occupied a place in the hearts of Mr. and Mrs. Melton very near to their own children. As she prepared, later, to go to her father the good pastor said gently, "I should be very glad to give your father such consolation as a Christian clergyman is able to afford, but I do not know if it would be acceptable to him. I have visited him at times, but have

always felt that he did not desire me to do so. If it will not be an intrusion I will go again to-morrow."

She found him lying in the old place where he had been for so long. He had changed since she saw him last, though he was the same prisoner, so far as motion was concerned; and she felt that he was now captive to a stronger than his old master. He looked at her as she stood by his bedside and took his hand in hers; and she saw that with his recognition of her, some of the old expression came into his eyes, flaming up suddenly and putting out the feeble passivity which had been in them at first.

Had he not yet forgiven her? she asked herself. Could it be that he would carry his implacability over the dark river? Her heart was heavy as she turned from the bed and seated herself beyond his range of vision.

Her stepmother's greeting was more cordial than usual. Mrs. Kroom had had her husband to herself till she was glad of other companionship. She shrank from the one who was gradually closing his relentless grasp upon him, and could not bear to witness the carrying away of the captive, alone. She told Murva of the gradual change which had come over her father, dwelling upon all the details with that faithfulness in their delineation which showed the narrow boundaries of her daily life.

Dr. Crawford said to her, after an examination of his patient, that he would return later to escort her back to the Meltons' home, as there was no prospect of an immediate change in her father's condition. But Murva, feeling her stepmother's desire, turned to her and asked,

"Would you not like me to remain with you to-night,

mother? And the "mother" seemed to fall naturally from her lips as she spoke.

"If you don't mind," replied Mrs. Kroom.

"Then I will gladly stay," said Murva, "and"—turning to Donald—"you will be here again in the morning?"

"Yes, early in the morning," he replied. "But do not sit up! Go to bed, and get your rest. The nurse can do all that is necessary."

Mrs. Kroom had lately been obliged to call in the services of a night-nurse, sorely against her will, because of the expense; for she must have provision for her old age. Murva promised to do so, and found herself later in her old room where she had not slept since leaving her father's house, all those years ago, driven out by him in his anger which had not yet, she feared, burned itself away. Her rest was fitful and broken, and she finally started suddenly from her uneasy slumber, broad awake as if she had not been in bed at all, to find the daylight struggling through the windows. She felt impelled to rise and go downstairs at once. She experienced none of the lassitude which she frequently felt on waking, and which she had to shake off by a vigorous effort of will before she could get up.

Almost without her own volition she sprang out of bed, thrust her feet into slippers, and, throwing on a dressing-gown, ran hastily but lightly and noiselessly downstairs and into the sitting-room. Her stepmother lay asleep upon a lounge, and as she looked through the door of her father's room she saw that the nurse was asleep in her high-backed chair. She passed quickly to the bedside and stood there, made powerless to move by what she saw.

Like a thief in the night death had come upon his victim and was just loosing the last hold upon things

worldly. Nicholas Kroom was drawing almost his last breath. With a spasmodic movement his head turned toward Murva, and she saw in his eyes a wild imploring as they rested upon her, a look as if he begged her to hold him back from that which was tearing him away; a look which had none of the old anger and unforgivingness, but was entreating and beseeching instead, while the eyes stared at something beyond her which imprinted horror and despair upon his face. It was pinched and drawn and a grey whiteness was over it, through which that look made its way, chilling Murva's very soul within her.

Even as she looked at him, with a little struggle in his throat which she saw but did not hear, for it was noiseless, his breath ceased, while his eyes still stared at and through her.

The absolute stillness of it all was appalling, and held her for the moment without the power of speech or motion. The nurse moved a little in her chair, and this broke the spell. She called loudly, and her stepmother sprang to the door, while the aroused nurse grasped the side of the bed as her eyes fell upon the dead face of Nicholas Kroom.

In the grey morning light his soul had been wrested from him by a despot more powerful than he had ever been; while the only watcher at its departure was the child he had rejected—when she ceased to be his vassal.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE funeral was over. That which had been called Nicholas Kroom was put out of sight, and his townspeople went about their accustomed ways with a remembrance of him which was best expressed by silence.

Harold Deering had come to Millville at once on receipt of Dr. Crawford's telegram announcing the death, and had sought to soothe and comfort his wife by every means in his power when he heard of the shock which she had experienced. Murva was deeply thankful that she had remained in her father's house that night; yet there was before her, for days, that awful grey-white face with its dumb imploring.

She remembered old John Wilson's views of death: the mountain on the other side of "the valley of the shadow" which had to be climbed: and from her inmost heart went up the prayer that, if this were so, there might be some kindly hand held forth to her father as he came out of the dark valley and found himself at the base of that mountain on whose top lay what he had to, sometime, reach. For he must be tired, frightened and bewildered, she thought to herself, and surely the good God made provision for all His creatures according to their needs. If these did not cease with the giving up of the mortal breath, then the supply for them could not cease either. "Like as a father pitieth his children," old John had said. She could leave him to the care

and guidance which, unlike the earthly, would never sleep while even one of these little ones was in extremity.

She did not mourn over her father's death. Why should she? She did better then that: she cleared from her remembrance of him the last vestige of resentment, and filled it with the best she knew of him, feeling that there was a better above that. She voluntarily resigned, in the interest of her stepmother, all claim upon her father's small estate, feeling that she was the one most in need of it—a decision in which her husband promptly acquiesced.

Mrs. Kroom decided to return to her old home as soon as the house she lived in could be sold. Her husband's business had been disposed of long before his death. With what remained to her, and the proceeds of this sale, she could live more than comfortably in the surroundings she had left to become Nicholas Kroom's wife.

On the third day after the funeral Harold Deering returned to New York alone, granting his wife's request that she be allowed to remain for a few days longer. Murva had a half-defined purpose in mind which she wished to carry out before returning home. She did not want to make any mistake; did not want to allow any feeling to wax strong within her which could be clearly shown her to be unworthy of a woman and a wife. She had a strong sense of justice, and this led her to examine carefully her own motives and conclusions, to see if misconceptions prompted them. Look which way she would, one bald fact confronted her at every turn: the duty of the wife because of the nature of the husband, and the latitude tacitly allowed him for the same reason.

But this same sense of justice, and an instinct as well, made her rebel against this accepted fact as a necessary and inevitable one. What could she do? What step should she take to satisfy herself one way or the other? She wanted to know. She wanted to do everything in her power that would give her knowledge on these vital questions, for they were vital ones. They lay at the foundation of the marriage relation, and upon their answer depended the nature of the marriage built upon it. True marriage is prompted by love, she argued. Of course! Everybody knew that! But what is love? Something which endures for ever? How could that be known? From evidence offered it seemed to endure for a season.

What was that feeling, called love, which prompts marriage? What its nature? She had the conviction that there was a deathless love; but she was beginning to see that this was not the feeling of a lover for his loved one, though her feeling might be higher than his and come nearer to it.

But she could get help in one direction. Dr. Crawford was an old and trusted friend, as well as a physician. He was competent to put one side of the matter fairly before her, and would respect her confidence at the same time, did she feel it necessary to give it to him. By remaining a few days she could confer with him as the physician who could give her positive and reliable information regarding the physical constitution of the husband, and if it made his needs on that line so imperative and all-absorbing as to shape everything else to themselves.

A day or two after her husband's return to the city, Donald invited her to accompany him on his drive to a patient who lived some distance in the country. "It

will do you good," said he. "You are too thoughtful."

Murva laughed a little, as she replied, "I do not think that over-thoughtfulness can be urged as an objection against women in general."

"Go, dear," said Kate. "You are looking paler than I like to see you." So Murva prepared herself, climbed into the doctor's buggy, and drove away with him. Here was the opportunity she wanted, and how should she begin to improve it? How bring forward and discuss the subject she had in view and keep it upon general grounds, so that she would not appear to have a particular and personal interest in it and in what he might reply to it?

They drove by the very small house of one of the poorest men in Millville. In the street before it, as well as behind it and on both sides of it, were children, a swarm of them and of assorted sizes. The sum of their clothing would have ordinarily been considered sufficient for half their number. The larger ones were taking care of the smaller ones, and the smaller ones were taking care of themselves. They all looked alike, as if they were made after the same pattern; and looked at Murva and Dr. Crawford when they drove by as if they had a grudge against the world for being in it, but meant to get all the enjoyment they could, just the same.

Murva looked at the many dirty faces and fingers which seemed to take Jack Frost's nips as a matter of course, and asked suddenly, "Do you think that a man as poor and lazy as Jim Harris is, has any right to have such a family of children?"

Donald laughed. "It is not a question of right but of nature," he said. "The privilege of marriage and

parenthood belongs to the poorest and most inefficient equally with the wealthiest and most capable."

"But what belongs to the children, Donald? What is their privilege?"

"Well, it would seem as if, in some cases, like this one for instance, the privilege of being born and getting on afterwards any way they can, was about the only one they had."

"But, Donald, this is not right! Now, is it? More than that is due children, even the poorest of them."

"But, Murva, if parents can do no more for their children, even if they had the will, than feed and clothe them, and that scantily, during their infant years; if this is all they are able to do, hard as it is for the children, there seems to be no remedy for it."

"It seems to me," said Murva firmly, "as if there was one sure and all-embracing remedy. If this is all a man and woman can do for a child, what right have they to be parents? They should not be."

"But we come back to our starting-point," replied Donald. "It is entirely a question of nature; and that is stronger in men and women than any law that ever has been or ever could be devised. Children are the legitimate consequence of human nature. Any attempted restriction of parenthood would be a blow aimed at the fundamental right of individuals, which is beyond all other rights. We can say to Jim Harris, 'Go to work with a vim, and do the best you can to take care of yourself or we will not help you in the least, will not have anything to do with you.' But we cannot say 'You must not have children, for you cannot support them.' He can have just as many as mother Nature ushers into the world through him, and the community must help him to take care of them."

"But I cannot feel satisfied with this view of the matter," insisted Murva. "There is rank injustice somewhere. It puts all the necessity on the side of the parents and recognises none for the children. They are merely the helpless victims of these necessities and they must bear—no help for it—all that these entail upon them. I cannot see that the children have any individual fundamental right at all except, when they get old enough, to perpetuate the kind of parenthood which is responsible for them. To me this is horrible."

"There is much that seems wrong, that should not be, consequent upon the relation of the sexes even in marriage, when we look upon it with our higher individual views which inevitably rouse in us dissatisfaction with prevailing conditions. But we have to deal with facts instead of with our dissatisfactions; and that Nature must and will have her way is one of the greatest of these. All that can be done is to regulate and legalise the means through which this is accomplished, and this regulation must apply equally to all. All men are equal before the law. The husband and father who cannot put bread into his own mouth, who is vile and debased in every conceivable way as a man, is exactly the same, so far as the legal recognition of his husbandly and fatherly right goes, as any other husband and father in the community. The wife and children of such a man have to bear the misfortune of their position. There is no help for it."

Murva was silent for a few minutes, pondering what Dr. Crawford had said. It all tended to confirm her fears. Finally she asked, "Would not Mrs. Harris do well to take the matter into her own hands, and refuse to have more children?"

"But she has no right to do so!" answered Dr. Crawford. "She is a wife."

"And because a woman is a wife she must continue to bear children, whether she wishes to or not? Whether it is best or not?" asked Murva.

"Do you not see," continued Donald, "that this is the natural and legitimate result of her position as a wife? She takes this obligation upon her when she marries, and whatever her husband demands of her as her husband she must meet and fulfil. Of course there are cases where it is better, for many reasons, that married pairs should not have children; and, with these, a mutual understanding is all-essential. But the refusal of a wife to meet the conditions of marriage, to recognise the rights and the needs of her husband, would be totally unwarranted, except in extreme, exceptional instances. That would be a blow aimed at marriage itself, and would surely open the way for unlicensed indulgence outside of the marriage relation on the part of the husband, for which the wife would be responsible. It would be a calamity for both of them."

"Dr. Crawford, I want to ask you as a physician," said Murva, speaking quietly and slowly, "if the physical needs of men are really the necessities which must govern and regulate the conditions of marriage? Are they, in themselves, by their own nature, necessities, or are they so considered through desire and education?"

"They are necessities in themselves, most certainly," answered the physician. "A man's health and vigour depend upon their being met, for they are a vital part of his nature."

"Then an unmarried man must have his needs met, equally with the married man, in order to preserve his health?" continued Murva.

Dr. Crawford hesitated. "Unfortunately, yes," he

replied finally. "But it would not do to declare this fact to unmarried women."

"If this is so, if unmarried men must, because of the necessities of their nature, follow that course which alone can preserve their health, why is it pronounced immoral?" she asked.

"That is the sweeping decision which is the consequence of no discrimination. The necessary amount of food is right and essential. Over-indulgence is gluttony, which is reprehensible. Immorality is this over-indulgence, not the necessary, as every physician knows. Therefore the marriage relation is the safe and proper one; and this is why all physicians frequently advise young men to marry. A good wife is often their salvation."

"Then it would follow," continued Murva, "that the woman who was the means of meeting the unmarried man's legitimate necessities was not immoral. This could be said only of the one who was the partner of his over-indulgence."

Dr. Crawford started. "Why!—why!—this view of it never occurred to me. I——"

"But if this course is justifiable on the part of the unmarried man, if he is compelled to pursue it, surely the means by which his health is preserved is not deserving of condemnation," argued Murva.

"He ought to marry! He ought to marry!" answered Dr. Crawford hurriedly.

"But while he is getting ready to marry? He cannot do so always when he would wish to. He must be able to support a wife. Meanwhile he must, of course, preserve his health. This necessitates, as a legitimate factor in the community, the means of that preservation, does it not?"

Dr. Crawford jerked the reins nervously, and did not reply.

"I do not see," Murva went on, "why the moral young man—according to this definition of immorality—the one who seeks only that which is a necessity, should consider the woman through whom he secures it immoral. Or why, admitting this doctrine of physical necessity as the all-powerful ruler, to the place of law which must regulate all things, society should condemn either party. Both are equal partakers in that which nature demands and must have. Where is there, justly, condemnation?"

"A woman's needs are not the equal of man's," he replied.

"That is not the point, and you know it is not!" insisted Murva. "If what is commonly called immorality in a young man is not really immorality up to a certain point, but a necessity to his well-being instead, that fact legitimises the course he so far pursues and his partner in it. And medical science, through its representatives, is authority for this fact, and so sponsor for these logical conclusions. I do not see that the woman concerned differs from the wife who comes afterward, except in the feeling with which the man regards her. Both are recompensed for their services."

Donald turned and looked at her. He saw that she was speaking with deep feeling. Her cheeks were flushed, her eyes were very bright, and she was looking straight before her as if she were talking more to herself than to him.

"And the woman who ministers to the moral young man is free to accept or reject his request, for he must request. The wife is bound hand and foot by her wifehood to the demand of her husband, for he has

the right to demand. There is something very strange about this which I do not understand."

"Well, Murva, do not seek to. Let it alone," he said. "It is not your province to take up such questions as these and to battle for them in your own individual person. Nature and custom are too powerful for you or anyone else to contend against; and there is the bright as well as the dark side to all things."

"But it is the principle involved, Donald! It is the fundamental wrong which is declared to be the necessary consequence of nature, but which is really unjust, that I must declare against, seeing it to be so. It is not a question of what I have or have not, what I like or do not like, as an individual. It is the judgment, based upon what is declared to be inexorable nature, that is put forward as law and sanctioned as such to the domination of all else, with both the man and the woman. All which their relation to each other includes, all their individual desires and instincts, must wheel into line under this despot and acknowledge its right to rule. And I cannot—I cannot. There is a better and a higher ruler than that. It makes woman merely the minister to man's physical nature, and makes man the supporter and maintainer of the woman, because she is this minister. Her needs should have equal place with his, and they—thank heaven!—are of a higher order. But this position for her crushes and stifles them; they have no recognised place, no opportunity for development and action, because of what this horrible juggernaut of physical necessity makes the wife. Why should woman be only a necessary appendix to man? Why should his needs rule and regulate what she must be, to the exclusion of her own? Why has she not the same

right to demand the recognition for hers which he has for his? It is because he is a man, as well as a husband, that so much is considered to be his due. Why should not the woman, as well as the wife, be considered also? I tell you, Donald, there is something in me—and it must belong to the woman nature, therefore cannot be mine alone—which revolts against this position for her; something which tells me that it is unworthy of them both: something which is growing stronger than my old idea of wifely devotion; something which shows me the gross element in it, and holds before me a far higher and grander model, and I will not——"

She checked herself suddenly, for, all at once, she realised that she had allowed herself to be carried away by her feelings, and that Dr. Crawford was looking at her in astonishment.

"I cannot be reconciled to the physician's decision, Donald," she said with a feeble smile.

"But it need not in any wise affect you, Murva. Let well enough alone. Be thankful that you enjoy the happy marriage which is yours. You cannot remedy conditions for others, or reverse social laws. No one will ever change the conditions which underlie them, for they are too deeply rooted in human nature. While I, as a man, can see a far higher ideal represented by the union of man and woman, as a physician I know that the physical element is the governing element in marriage as it is, and why it must be so. There are exceptions to all rules, and of course there are married pairs to-day who recognise and strive to conform to a higher possibility. Yet the unions are exceedingly rare where happiness and confidence can remain undisturbed when physical needs do not receive the attention they demand, from whatever cause."

Dr. Crawford drew rein as he ceased speaking, for he had arrived at his destination. Left alone, Murva leaned back in the carriage and closed her eyes. She felt very weary, not physically so much as inwardly.

"I believe I am tired for the whole human race," she said to herself. "Can what he says be true? If it is, what is there to look forward to?"

The time did not seem long before Donald returned, and they had started for home. She did not resume the subject, neither did he. She had received the authoritative information she sought, and he was unusually grave and thoughtful. With all her respect for and admiration of Donald Crawford she could not help saying to herself, "Poor Kate!" And yet, what a blessed lot was hers in comparison to that of thousands of other women.

CHAPTER XXII.

For a day or two Murva pondered over what Dr. Crawford had said to her, unable to accept the verdict given, striving to see through the puzzle caused by the conflict of authority with her own instincts, anxious to make no mistakes. She could not rest till more light came to her than she now had, and in spite of the mocking voices which she could hear deriding her for what she was doing—she had no wrongs to right—she resolved to make another effort for more knowledge and understanding. Surely religion could afford help in this most important of all matters; could supply where the scientific decision, as given by the medical fraternity, left off, and furnish the higher reason for existing facts than was there embodied. The church had ever been the refuge when all else failed; and she claimed that here was the abundant supply for every need, that no one should be sent empty away who came to her for help or protection. As God's representative on earth, the divine voice spoke through her, making her word the divine authority.

Murva had known Mr. Melton from her childhood. He was a devout, pure-hearted Christian minister. Surely he could help her in this extremity, for extremity it was. Religion was the last teacher she could turn to. After that there was nothing but herself.

One afternoon when Kate was asleep in her own room

and Mrs. Melton had departed for a neighborhood call, she ascended the stairs to Mr. Melton's study and knocked at the door. "Come in;" said the kindly voice cheerily, and Murva opened the door, feeling half guilty as she entered the room.

"Sit down, my child, sit down," continued the good old man as he saw who it was. "This is an unusual pleasure. I am glad to have a visit from you all for myself." And he laid his spectacles down and turned toward her. "We'll have another log on that fire, and then draw up and enjoy it while we chat."

Murva smiled upon him gratefully as he drew a large easy-chair to the fireplace for her and took another beside her. "Mr. Melton," she began hesitatingly, "I have been thinking for the last few days about religious teachings, and I want to know more of them than I do."

"I am glad you have come to me, my child. You shall have all the help I can give you. Are you becoming concerned about your soul?"

"Not exactly, Mr. Melton," she replied, as she thought to herself that her concern, at present, had much more to do with the body.

"The hereafter awaits us all," continued Mr. Melton, "and it behooves us to be prepared for it."

"I am afraid, sir, that I am thinking more of the present, just now, than of the future. Like Martha, I am troubled about many things, and have not yet chosen that better part. It is concerning these things that I want your instruction."

"Say on, my child! I am ready to listen to you."

"I want to know, Mr. Melton, just what are the teachings of the Christian church as to the relation of husband and wife."

Mr. Melton looked at her with an awakening surprise.

"It seems to me," she continued steadily, "that, as at present understood, they contain an element of injustice to the wife; but I can see that my view is exceptional, and I do not want to make a mistake or rest under a delusion."

"There is much injustice in the way many men treat their wives, my dear; but where do you see any injustice in the relation itself?" asked the minister.

"I do not think there is any in the relation itself, in what it truly is," replied Murva. "But I think the common view of it is contrary to its nature, and it is this view, which is universally acted upon, that—to my thinking—is based upon an injustice."

"Go on, my child. Explain yourself freely," said the good man encouragingly.

"It seems to me that man and woman are equals; that if God is no respecter of persons, He made them so. Therefore it does not seem to me right that the husband should so far take precedence of the woman as to compel conformity on her part to all his self-claimed rights when they conflict with those which must equally belong to herself."

"My child," said Mr. Melton. "In a true marriage there will be no question of 'my rights' or 'your rights.' It will be 'our rights,' because, in such, the woman will recognise her true position toward the man. She is to be an helpmeet for him according to the divine command."

"I do not see why he should not be equally an helpmeet for her," said Murva.

"I think, according to the spirit of the Word, that is the case," replied the minister. "But the letter says

that the woman was brought unto the man for his helpmeet. Truly, 'a man shall leave his father and mother and shall cleave unto his wife : and they shall be one flesh.' "

"This 'one flesh' which they shall be, means unity of purpose and desire, consequently concord in action, does it not?" asked Murva.

"I think we may so construe it," replied the minister.

"Then, when the purpose and the desire of one is opposed to those of the other, what is to be done?"

"The wife should yield to the husband when this does not entail the sacrifice of principle or the breaking of a moral law; for 'the husband is the head of the wife.' "

"What makes him so?" asked Murva.

"Why, this is a divine ordinance, my child! Man was made first, woman second as the complement to man which his nature needs. ("There it is again!" thought Murva to herself.) The husband is the head of the wife, as Christ is the head of the church. Paul says, 'the head of the woman is the man.' Here we have the authority of Holy Writ. He also says of women, 'They are commanded to be under obedience, as also saith the law.' Surely this is sufficient to satisfy us."

"I cannot say that it is sufficient for me, Mr. Melton," said Murva. "And, oh, I do want to be satisfied!" she added impulsively, turning toward him.

"Yes, yes, my child, you shall be!" answered the good man quickly. "Surely we can have no higher authority than the Word of God! And if you will study that carefully, I am sure that you will be repaid."

"But, Mr. Melton, it seems to me that the injustice

is right here; is shown in the words of Paul, which you have quoted. Who has made the law which says that woman shall be under obedience?"

"Why, it is God's law as declared in the Bible, my child, and our civil law maintains it."

"Then both divine and civil law make the husband the possessor of the wife to the end of her life, irrespective of any desires or rights of her own as an individual?" asked Murva.

"Do you not see, my dear, that the family is a unit and the man is its representative?" continued the good minister, drawing his chair a little nearer to hers in his desire to make the matter clearer to her. "The family is made up of husband, wife and children. It is many in one, and but one can stand for it, so it is natural and right that this one should be the man. No individual member of the family can have interests separate from the family interests, and these are all centered in the man who is the head. He stands for their individual interests equally with his own, because he stands for the unit. It is through marriage that this unit is made and established that God's command to increase and multiply is fulfilled. The husband's possession of his wife is to this end, and it is right and just."

"But suppose, Mr. Melton, that a wife does not wish to bear children?"

"Oh, but, my dear, that is both unnatural and irreligious! I do not like to suppose that of any woman who is a wife."

"But if, having already borne children, she does not wish to bear more, and for reasons which, to her, are all-sufficient, what then? Is the husband's possession of the wife so absolute as to compel continuance?"

"The reasons must be most extraordinary that could justify a wife in such a refusal, provided she was physically able to meet the requirements of motherhood," replied Mr. Melton. "Paul says 'The wife hath not power of her own body, but the husband.' The husband's right, as the head of the wife, extends so far, and she would be failing sadly in her duty did she refuse to recognise his right."

As Murva listened to this reply of the good minister her whole soul rose up in revolt against it. She seemed filled with a hot, burning indignation and spirit of rebellion, not only against this decision but against religion itself, if this were its teachings.

"I do not see that this must be true because Paul said it," she broke out. "He was nothing but a man, who spoke as a man, and so only gave his opinion. Why should men and women be bound by it to-day or to the end of time?"

"But, my child!" said Mr. Melton, sitting erect in his chair and speaking in a surprised tone, "Paul was the apostle called of God! He spoke as the apostle, and his teachings have remained sacred to this day in consequence, and ever will."

"But is it not possible that an apostle who is but a man may give a man's views and be just a little mistaken if he thinks them God's commands? A mistake in which we may share if we accept them as divine behests.

And Murva looked as if she could readily conceive and admit this possibility as she proposed it to good Mr. Melton, who sank back suddenly from his erect position, and looked at her as if there was more serious work to be done in her behalf than he had anticipated.

"But what Paul says is a part of Holy Writ, don't

you see, Murva? And the Bible is the Word of God. How can we depart from its plain declarations for one moment?" He said this very gently, but in a tone which declared very conclusively that any other course was impossible.

Murva was silent for a moment, but finally, plucking up courage, she replied in an equally gentle tone. "It seems to me, Mr. Melton, that the highest reason and authority we can have for doing anything is because it is right to do it; because we can clearly see that it is right and so we cannot do otherwise. While I would not disparage the Bible for one moment, it seems to me that this is the higher position; and if one's sense of right opposes a statement in that, what is one to do?"

The minister was silent in his turn, and seemed to be thinking carefully of his answer, but after a moment he replied,

"The fact that we are often unable to see clearly what is right, are compelled to ask help and assistance thereto, should show us that we are unable of ourselves to reach up to and lay hold of that right which is God's law, or see the reason for it. This being so, as you will admit, we must have some guide. One is necessary because of this very inability of ours. So we have His Word for this purpose; and when we cannot see a why or a wherefore it is safest to abide by that."

"But, Mr. Melton," continued Murva, "the Bible statements are so contradictory. One declares the opposite of what another affirms. What is one going to do?"

"Follow the ones whose meaning is clear and plain to you, and leave the rest till you have grown, through obedience, to where you have more light in which to see. Now do not allow yourself to reject Paul's teach-

ings, because what he says does not accord with your present opinion, but rather strive to bring that into accord with his apostolic declarations. These are plain and clear enough in the matter to which you refer."

"Mr. Melton," asked Murva suddenly, "we are all sinners till, through a change of heart and faith in Jesus Christ, we are saved, are we not?"

"Yes, my child."

"I am a sinner if I have not experienced this change —and I cannot say that I have—am I not?"

"I am afraid that you are, my dear."

"Jesus Christ came to save such, did he not?"

"Surely!"

"Does he save them by families or individually?"

Again the good minister sat erect and looked at her in astonishment.

"By—by—— Why! what do you mean?" he said.

"Why, if the family is a unit of which the man is the head, if he represents the wife, and she has no separate voice and no right to her own individual views and desires as a woman, if these must all be conformed to the husband's, if he possesses her, body and all, I should suppose that salvation for him would be salvation for her, and that she had nothing to do with it; had only to keep quiet, and let her head receive it, because, of course, she goes with him." And she looked at him with a demure little smile just hinting its existence at the corners of her mouth.

"I am afraid, my dear, that you are a little irreverent," said Mr. Melton reprovingly. "Each one must secure his own salvation, must make his own peace with God. This cannot be done by proxy. Another's belief in the atoning blood of Jesus Christ cannot save you or me. We must each believe."

"Then why should not the woman be free to work out this all-essential salvation, which is for her as a woman, as an individual, not as a wife?"

"I cannot see why she is not, my child," replied Mr. Melton, a little wearily.

"But I can," insisted Murva. "This absolute possession of a wife by the husband must prevent her from acting as she would were it not so. If her individual desires oppose his they must yield, and his prevail. Your St. Paul says, 'Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands as unto the Lord.' And 'As the church is subject unto Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything.' See! He says 'in everything.' What individual freedom is there left the woman? None! And I feel that this is not right even if Paul does declare it. I do not feel that his decision is binding upon me when my own sense of right and justice contradicts it. I feel that I ought to act according to my own conviction, instead of his, and unless I am free as an individual, even though I am a wife, I do not see how I can reach anything but what my husband holds in his hand and reaches out to me; not even salvation for my soul."

She did not realise how she had swerved from the general to the particular, how she was speaking in the first person, till Mr. Melton said, "I had thought that yours was an exceptionally happy marriage, my child. Excuse me if I ask, has it proven otherwise?" And he looked at her anxiously.

The colour flashed to Murva's face as she replied quickly.

"Oh, no, no! My Harold is one of the best of husbands. I would not have you think for a moment that I am complaining of my own fate. It is the principle

involved that I am—resisting! Yes! I suppose that is the word; but it seems to me so unjust that I cannot help it. I may not suffer under it, but thousands inevitably must. All men are not like my Harold. Think what a power marriage puts into their hands. How can it be otherwise than that multitudes of women are bound hand and foot, by this absolute possession as the husband's right, in conditions which are little less than slavery. Yes! It is slavery when a woman's body belongs more to another than it does to herself; when she can confer no favour, but, instead, must acknowledge rights. Oh, Mr. Melton,"—and she turned toward him imploringly—"do not think for a moment that I am condemning marriage! I am only insisting, because I must—my instinct and my convictions compel me—that this prevailing view of marriage is contrary to man's higher nature, however much it may accord with the lower, and it only strengthens this lower at the expense of the higher. Oh, I see it now! I see it now!" she exclaimed suddenly, as she started to her feet and stretched her arms out before her, while her eyes became fixed upon something afar off, and her face took on the intense and rapt look of one who sees the invisible, "That cross upon the shoulder of the woman, while its other end drags upon the ground. It is she who is bowed under and bears the burden of physical necessity. It is she who will bear it as long as she bends. It will fall to the ground by its own weight when she holds herself erect, not before. 'Tis the cross upon which woman has been crucified."

Her voice rang out full and strong and clear till as she uttered the last words it sank to a tone of hushed and reverent awe, while her eyes continued to gaze out

and up as if she saw a Crucified One who was dying for the sins of the many.

"He died that others might live," she continued in the same low voice, as if she were communing with herself, unconscious of all surroundings; "she has died for centuries, that man might live, and religion has nailed her to that cross."

Mr. Melton watched her, fascinated and wondering, for her face and attitude impressed him so powerfully he scarcely heard her words. Slowly her gaze came back to her surroundings and fell upon her companion's face while her arms dropped to her side. She half smiled as she saw how intently and wonderingly he was regarding her, and said quietly, "I think the world needs a new religion, one for women. Christianity is for men."

Mr. Melton made no reply as she seated herself again and dropped her head upon her hand. He hardly knew how to deal with the situation. The whole matter upon which Murva had consulted him was perfectly clear and plain to him, and her position was one of feeling without reason, such as was common to women. A new religion? Well, well!

She looked at him finally and said, "You are very good, Mr. Melton, to be so patient with me, and I will not tax you further than to gain a clear understanding of the position of woman in marriage as taught by the religion you represent. This is—please correct me if I am wrong—that from the moment a woman becomes a wife, she is more wife than woman. Her individuality becomes merged in her husband's, and because there is no room for its exercise, he standing for both, according to civil and ecclesiastical law, these a unit upon this point. He is her possessor even to her person,

which is more his than hers, and this a right belonging to him because he is a man, and which is held as such both by divine and human law. Resistance to this right of his through a claim of individual right on the part of the woman would be resistance to both the divine and the human law, and the woman, so acting, would be culpable, the right on the side of the husband, the wrong with her. This mutual position of the husband and the wife is the consequence of the nature of the man who needs the helpmeet, woman. It is her office to faithfully minister to his necessities; it is his office to love and cherish her according to his view of love which is based upon his, and the common view of, his needs. The true wife is the one who concedes these, holding no contrary opinion, who acts upon them with no attempt at possession of herself."

As she ceased she looked at the minister inquiringly.

"The true wife will be satisfied to be a wife, and will do her best to meet the requirements of the position, certainly!" he said. "The woman should not marry who is unwilling to do this."

"But how can a woman know what it is to be a wife, know what is required of her, till she marries?" asked Murva.

"They have the examples of their mothers and others, and they do know that the position and duties of the wife must be very different from those of the unmarried woman," replied Mr. Melton.

"They know this fact, Mr. Melton," said Murva, "but how can they possibly know what it requires of them, what the fact includes, till they have the experience?"

He did not answer.

"Here is a question to be considered," she con-

tinued. "If a woman, after marriage, finds that she cannot and should not act as is required of her by her husband, through his exercise of his rights as a husband and because of his needs as a man, and this she could not possibly know before marriage, what shall she do? If she stands true to her own conviction, which is hers through experience, and refuses to concede his right at the expense of her own, her husband will be justified, both by ecclesiastical and civil law, in repudiating her, because she has neglected her duty as a wife and refused to minister to his necessities. Why should there not be some honourable way open for the woman who acts thus and because she feels it her duty so to do?"

"Our laws provide for honourable separation between those parties where one has violated the marriage obligation——"

"And only for one, in a degree, dishonourable to the wife when neither has done so," interrupted Murva quickly. "But I see that what I feared is true. I wanted to be assured of the nature of religious teachings upon the subject of marriage, and so I came to you. I thank you heartily for the instruction you have given me, and I wish I were more amenable to it. I should feel much more comfortable than I do, I suppose."

And, rising to her feet, she held out her hand to the good minister who, rising also, looked at her with a troubled expression in his kind face.

"My child," he said as he took it in his own, "be careful what you do. The course of action that your words indicate would produce the most disastrous consequences. It would drive a man to violation of his marriage vows who otherwise would be true to them."

As she stood thus her eye fell upon the open Bible on Mr. Melton's study table beside them, and she caught some words which made her look closer. Glancing at him she said, "Here is a statement of Paul's which I have not yet heard you quote. In this, at least, I can agree with him" and she read aloud, "'He that standeth steadfast in his heart, having no necessity, but hath power over his own will, and hath so decreed in his heart that he will keep his virgin, doeth well.'"

Walking to the door, she turned as she reached it to say, with her hand upon the knob, "My good friend, I can see little manhood in the husband whose fidelity depends upon his wife instead of upon himself," and left the room.

CHAPTER XXIII.

WHAT next? Murva Deering asked herself this question as she made her preparations for returning home on the following day. She felt as if she had lived years in the last few weeks. Since the glimpse she had had of Kate's hidden sorrow she seemed to have come face to face with something from which she had stripped a veil and whose features grew more horrible to her the more she gazed upon it. But another fact was making itself felt with her as well. Since her conversations with Dr. Crawford and Mr. Melton she was convinced that, however much she might rebel against existing conditions, however unjust they might seem to her or any other woman to be, the one who should openly resist them from this conviction, would find the world against her. Religion, science, politics, however antagonistic these might be to each other, would stand arrayed in solid phalanx to oppose her, welded together by the common human nature which maintains these as bulwarks for itself.

The woman who should dare to step out openly from the ranks into this position, dare to be the David for this Goliath, would find that even those whom she would help might condemn instead of support her, and consider her act altogether unwarranted. For, over and above all else, as the voice which gave these utter-

ance severally and collectively, spoke public opinion and dared her to leave the time-worn path of tradition, conservatism, and custom, to hew out a new road for herself. One woman's opposing instinct to conditions accepted as right and necessary, her repudiation of these in the name of justice, her maintenance of an individual right from the conviction that this was a duty, what could that do? And her husband! Her dear, dear husband! Never dearer than in this time of new perception. Would he, too, see anew? See with the eyes of his own really God-like nature, or continue to use the spectacles which ecclesiastical religion, medical science and masculine politics had ready fitted for them from the moment of his birth?

What next? What next? was the unceasing query within her as she gathered her belongings together. She had had no further conversation with Kate. She could offer her no consolation, could express no conviction that she was mistaken, now. The emphatic declaration of necessity which she had heard from both Kate's husband and father, made that impossible. There was no help for Kate. It was for her to be thankful that she was as well off as she was. Harold was right when he said this. And yet—The words of Paul which she had read in Mr. Melton's study recurred to her—"He that standeth steadfast in his heart, *having no necessity*, but hath power over his own will." Surely this means that there is within and belonging to man, a power stronger than this cultivated necessity, she thought.

What is a man? Surely a being possessed of strength and power, the crown of creation because, capable of self-control, the power above all others. And what a confession of inefficiency, of unmanliness instead of manhood, was this insistence upon physical

necessity! Surely here was the "fall of man," the original sin and the sinner, the tempting of the serpent and the curse under which women brought forth; the curse under which children were conceived in sin instead of in virgin purity and brought forth in that suffering and sorrow which only the outraged and defiled higher nature could impose. The mother's groan of anguish with the child's wailing greeting to the world was the cry which went up to God by reason of their bondage, and which must some time bring the Moses, the deliverer which alone could lead mankind out of it by first delivering the woman.

And the seed of the woman was to bruise this serpent's head? A light flashed upon her. Yes! The curse would continue till woman herself removed it through the Moses within her; through her own higher perception. This was her work, this was where she was the only helpmeet for man, the only one able to show him to himself as he was before the fall into sense consciousness, as he must find himself to be if he would fulfil his nature and destiny. Now she saw why woman was made for man and brought to him; how she was to help him find and know what he could not see for himself in his sense blindness; how she was to lead him to that promised land of freedom from physical necessity. She drew a long breath of relief as meanings, where all had been darkness and perplexity, grew upon her; as she saw what the office of woman really was, and that the remedy for existing conditions, release from the curse, was in her own hands. She remembered her husband's antipathy to "strong-minded" women, his abhorrence of the workers for "woman's rights," and she smiled to herself as she thought that these had not yet found the key to the

situation, or, if they had, had not the courage to use it.

As she lifted some articles from a drawer to place them in her trunk one of them fell to the floor. She stooped and picked it up. It was one of her husband's neckties which had escaped his own travelling satchel to be cared for by her. A rush of affection for him came over her as she saw what it was, and she pressed it, senseless thing, to her lips, once, twice and again before she placed it for its homeward journey. As she worked she could hear the tremulous-with-age voice of hoary and revered public opinion, saying, "Traitor! Plotter against your husband's peace and happiness!" But though this cut her till she winced, as she would not have done had her accuser stood bodily before her, she knew that never in her seven years of married life had she loved her husband better than at this moment, for now she could see the man back of the husband and discern his higher needs.

She did love him! Oh, she did! But how would she have described her feeling? With all her soul she desired to be his true helpmeet. How should she be so? What should she do when she was once more at home? The question seemed to thrust itself squarely upon her, and she hurriedly lifted some of her clothing from the nearest chair that she might sit down, for her knees seemed suddenly weak and trembling.

"Stand by your conviction and act upon it," said the inner voice.

The trembling crept all over her.

"He will say that I do not love him," she protested.

"Because he does not yet know what love is," was the reply.

"He will say that I am cold and unfeeling," she urged.

"Because you are not dominated by passion," came the answer.

And before her inner vision as she sat there, rose two figures, one with tawny skin and dark, streaming hair, which floated out behind it, as if blown back by the rapid rush of its oncoming. Its breath was hot, and stung her face as it blew toward her. Its eyes blazed and glowed as they looked upon her; sparks of fire darted from them, but fell in ashes round its feet, and these were cold and white through the ashes, which, piling higher, were making their grave.

Its cheeks were warm and red, its lips were full and framed in a kiss, while the arms were stretched forth to clasp and hold her. But the cheeks had furrows in them under the red, and, looking down in these, she could see the white skull bones; and back of those panting, pulsing, beautiful lips she could see cruel, strong, white teeth, which held between them human flesh.

And on the inside of the arms which would clasp her were thorns, which would turn and twist and turn again in her back; while the breasts, to which she would be held, were serpents, whose heads were the nipples, coiled on either side; and these, with venomous tongues, were ready to strike into her own and draw out her blood.

But the form was beautiful, every line and curve perfect, down to the cold, white feet buried in the grave of ashes, whose grey winding-sheet was rising higher and higher.

Its head was crowned with poppies, its outstretched hands overflowed with them. Under these were iron chains, which were so kept hidden, while the fingers crushed and pressed their juice which would fall, drop

by drop, upon the one held in the figure's embrace, lulling the victim so that he would feel only the kiss, knowing naught of the thorns and the serpents till its fire was burned out and the grave coldness at the feet had crept up instead. Then these chains would hold him fast till the rising ashes had hidden him as the chains had first been hidden.

Its look seemed to devour her as she gazed upon it and to draw her toward itself, seeing only the supple form and the kissing mouth; but between her and it was a flaming sword, and the other figure held it there.

This was calm and stately and still. It seemed to have floated down before her from a region whose repose came with it; and, while the dusky one was naked, this serene majesty was clothed in white, trailing garments, which seemed a part of the figure. They shone with a light from within them, of which they seemed to be woven; and around and above it was this same light, which stretched away up out of sight as a bright and shining path to that region from whence it had come.

Its hair was silver-white, and rippled and flowed down the white garments till it became one with them, lost in their folds. Its eyes looked at her, through her, and beyond her to the end of time. On the brow rested a wreath of white lilies and immortelles; and, while the one hand held the sword that divided her from the dark one, the other held toward her a wreath like its own, and in every flower shone a star.

Its face was the countenance of love itself, divine, ineffable, unspeakable. Every feature was alive with that transcendent glory which spoke without words, and called Murva, as she gazed, so that her soul leaped from her body and knelt in adoration at the feet of that

presence which bore its own witness to its birthplace.

The silence seemed to say, "I am from above, that is from beneath." And Murva saw the living light of love, the cold, dead ashes of passion, and, between them, the consuming fire which divides life from death; which leaves, upon the one side, that which, from its nature, must die; but which, on the other, ushers upon the pathway of the spirit that resurrection from the dead which alone can travel upon this pathway and find its home.

As she read this meaning they were gone, and she started up and resumed work, saying to herself, "Ah! the one draws the body, but the other draws the soul."

She had been occupied but a few moments when there came a tap at the door, and, as it opened in response to her "Come in," her stepmother stood before her. Murva was surprised, as never before in her visits to Millville had her stepmother come to her; but she repressed all signs of the feeling and welcomed her, giving her the most comfortable chair in the room, while she sat down by her and asked, "How soon do you expect to leave here, mother? Have you been able to arrange affairs satisfactorily?"

"Well, about so-so," answered Mrs. Kroom hesitatingly. "I might have come off worse, an' it might be a good deal better. But I ain't complainin' and I ain't a-goin' to complain, though the man that's goin' to take the house has got the better of me in the matter o' two or three hundred dollars. I'll be too thankful to settle down again among my own kin to mourn long over that."

"Can Harold or I help you there?" asked Murva. "We will both do all we can to get——"

"No, no. There needn't be no interferin'," answered

Mrs. Kroom quickly. "What's done, stands. After all, money's a small thing beside peace an' comfort, and it's precious little of these I've had or that most women have after they get husbands." And she rocked back and forth in a disconsolate way, which touched Murva's ever-ready sympathy.

"You have had a most trying experience, mother," she said, "and I wish that I had been able to afford you more help than was possible for me. But now you will be free from such close claims upon your time and attention, and I hope you may find in the future some recompense for the past."

"There's some things that can't never be no different," replied Mrs. Kroom, as she went on rocking. "'Tain't the work and the worry, though them was bad enough. But we might as well let the dead rest. There's no tellin' but they've got the worst of it. I didn't come here to be stirrin' up what's past and gone except to give you this."

And she held out something which she had had in her hand all the while. It was a small scrap of paper which Murva took from her and opened, while her stepmother continued, "I found that in an old pocket-book since your father died. He used to keep it in a yaller looking letter before he was taken sick, and once, when I caught him lookin' at it, I snatched up the letter and tore it to pieces and flung 'em in the fire. He was awful mad and grabbed up one of 'em that had fell on the floor, afore I could get it. I expect that's the scrap you've got." And she nodded toward what Murva held in her hand.

It was a small lock of golden-brown hair tied in a ring with a part of itself, and was folded in this bit of paper which was written upon one side. Murva looked

at it with a curious feeling, while a faint and far-off remembrance seemed to be striving to awake within her.

"Do you suppose——" she began hesitatingly, and then stopped, thinking that her supposition might be unwelcome to her stepmother.

"I suppose that it's your mother's hair," said Mrs. Kroom, with an emphasis on the "suppose." "And I needn't, for I know!" she added rocking violently. "He wouldn't a kept it all these years and then hid it after I found him out if it hadn't a be'n."

Murva made no reply. She thought of her father as she had known him, and did not recognise the man who would treasure, for years, a lock of hair. She tried to remember her mother, but only a tantalising vagueness rewarded her.

Mrs. Kroom ceased rocking and said, with her hands on her knees, preparatory to rising, "I thought you might as well have it, and so I brought it to you for you've been uncommon decent about the property and everything, though I own I was tempted to throw it into the fire as I did the letter. So now we're quits, an' I'll say good-bye to you," rising as she spoke.

Murva felt that her stepmother had done much for her, and that it must have cost her a struggle; so she held out her hand and said, "Good-bye, mother; I go home to-morrow and shall not see you again; but if ever I can be of service to you, be sure to call upon me, and I will not fail you."

Mrs. Kroom took her hand for an instant rather awkwardly, dropping it to move toward the door where she said, turning back, "I'm glad you can feel to let bygones be by-gones, an' I'm sure I wish 'em to be. 'Tain't likely as I shall ever call on you, but I'm much obliged

all the same." And as her head disappeared down the stairs Murva thought to herself that she should never see her again. And she never did.

She went to the window and looked closely at the hair and the scrap of paper. Upon its inside surface was some writing, almost illegible, but she could decipher, "You say you love me, but I do not understand your love."

Had her mother wrestled with the same problem? Was it the common heritage of all women, dead and living? Was she but continuing her mother's quest? Should she find the answer while living which her mother had found only when dead?

CHAPTER XXIV.

"So you refuse me my rights?"

"No, Harold! I but claim my own."

Harold Deering stood by the fireplace, his brows contracted with a scowl, his eyes dark and sullen, hands in his pockets and elbows squarely set looking at his wife as he had never looked at her before. It was the look with which a man regards his enemy.

Murva was sitting, calm and still, in her chair, her head resting against its back, her hands upon the arms. She was very pale, but, though motionless, the ends of her fingers were pressed hard into the cushions beneath them. She returned his look with one combining the resolution of conscious power and the yearning of unselfish love. There was no trace of temper, of unwomanly assertion, of desire to test his endurance with meaningless whims. Quiet as she was, there breathed from her a steadfast purpose which placed her above such possibilities. She seemed perfectly self-poised, yet showed in her eyes a sympathy and a tenderness for her husband to which he seemed blind, which only a woman would have seen and understood.

"Do you realise that you are a wife?" he demanded.

"Yes, but I realise that I am also a woman," she replied; and she might have been a statue for any movement there was in her, only the look in her eyes deepened and grew entreating.

He turned about with a jerk, facing the fire and staring into it, with his hands thrust deeper into his pockets for a moment, finally facing her again with,

"Murva, what has got into you lately? I do not understand you at all. You seemed very queer when you came home and you have been growing more so ever since. What is it that you want? You are not the same woman that you used to be, and I tell you plainly that I do not like the change."

For a moment Murva covered her eyes with her hand, but she looked at him again almost immediately and said gently,

"Come and sit down by me, dear, will you not? I will try and tell you just what I want, and to show you that I want it only because it is right and just."

He came toward her slowly and sat down in the chair she had drawn beside her own, but the darkness of his face still continued, and he made no sign of pleasure at her nearness.

"Harold, dear," she began, "all my life I have longed for freedom, and it is that I want now."

"Freedom!" he interrupted her, almost savagely. "Haven't you got it I should like to know? I should think when you remember what I took you from you would see the difference."

"I do see the difference indeed, my dear husband," replied Murva laying hold of one of his hands and endeavouring to take it between her own, but as it did not move she rested hers upon it instead. "You took me from unhappiness and loneliness to the warmth and brightness and joy of your love and care. You have given me the happiest hours my life has ever known. Your heart and home have been heaven to me, such a heaven that I neither thought nor cared for another.

You brought sunshine to me who had never known aught but storm and cloud. My life with you has been living, where, before, it was a daily dying. There is no acknowledgment I would not freely make to you, claim what you will for what you have done for me. And now, when I say that the freedom I long for is in your power to grant, you can increase the sumptuousness of your giving by adding this to the daily and hourly bestowing I am experiencing at your hands. I——"

"You could not long for freedom, as you call it," he interrupted her, "except you had a sense of bondage; and you could have no such sense if you loved me as I have always supposed you did;" and his voice was a little uncertain as he said this.

"Harold! My husband! I never loved you more—I never loved you as much as I do this moment!" said Murva, rising and throwing her arms around him as he sat, pressing his head against her bosom. "'Tis for your own sake, as well as mine, that I say what I do. 'Tis because I recognise in you what you do not yet know of and because I know that it will respond to my call upon it, will rouse from the sleep unworthy of it, that I persevere in what hurts you now when I would rather suffer anything myself than give you one unnecessary pang. Oh, my husband! Look in my eyes and tell me, if you can, that I do not love you."

And she placed one hand under his chin and raised his head, so that he would look her in the face while she gazed down upon him with a heavenly sweetness which faintly touched, for an instant, something which seemed to lie deeper than his angry and excited feelings. But it was only a moment, and he turned his head out of her hand as he said,

"The woman who refuses to acknowledge her husband's rights can have little love for him."

"The woman who refuses to acknowledge these because they are her wrongs, can have much," returned Murva steadily. "She can love her husband too well to permit him to debase himself."

"Wrongs!" he ejaculated, as he started up again from his chair, nearly overturning Murva with the suddenness of his movement. "What wrongs have you got, I should like to know? Come, now! Once for all, out with them, and let us have an end of this matter!" And he planted himself once more squarely before her while his face twitched nervously.

Murva sat down again and pressed one hand tightly to her heart, covering it with her other arm. Truly, "the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak," she thought to herself. It was hard to contend thus, but it was still harder to keep silent and go on in the old way. And why should she not? Because it was the necessity of her nature to act according to her conscientious conviction.

"As your wife, Harold, I have no wrongs, and you, as the husband of that wife, have inflicted none. For what a husband is in the eye of the law, you are one of the best, and not a word is to be said against you. On the contrary, you are deserving of all praise. But as a woman I have some wrongs, and you, as a man, ignorantly inflict them, and will continue to do so if I do not, as your true helpmeet, prevent you. And this is because you do not in common with the rest of mankind, not as an exception, recognise my true relation as a woman toward you as a man; and this relation precedes any other, is the basis for the position of husband and wife toward each other, must be recog-

nised for this position to rest upon that sure foundation which can alone maintain it."

As Murva spoke, there floated into his memory the time when, in conversation with Dr. Crawford, before that gentleman's marriage, he had given eminently satisfactory—to him—reasons why this should be, and that should not be, in marriage. But somehow or other he did not like that his wife should be able to reason also instead of simply feeling satisfied.

"It is not right or just or true," she went on, "that a woman must be absorbed in a man because he is her husband and she is his wife. She has her own individuality, which cannot be extinguished, and marriage must afford her room for its exercise. This idea of proprietorship, together with the belief that woman's only office is to minister to man, prepares the way for that bondage which can belong only to the wife because she is a woman; a bondage which rests upon her so-called duty of ministration, which must include all she is, leaving nothing of herself for herself. Not even her body is her own, but all is his because his necessities demand this all, and the wife must give it. What freedom is there in this position? I cannot remain in it, Harold, I cannot rest content in this bondage,—for it is one, say what you will, where there is no consideration for my own necessities or even recognition of them. It is not you I object to, it is the position. You are but the means which bring what it holds home to me. It is not because I am your wife that I rebel. It is because I am a wife under these conditions which demand of me, through you, what I cannot and must not longer grant. I do not blame you, I blame it; but my resistance will naturally act as resistance to you. Try to see this, my dear husband! Try to see that I

am constrained to assert my own individuality, to maintain my right to myself as before and beyond any right another human being can have to me. All wifely duties outside of my womanhood I owe to you. All pertaining to that, I owe to myself. And so I claim my right to myself as prior to a husband's right to me. Of my person you can demand nothing, have no right so to do, and no human law ever enacted, past, present, or future, can give you such right. Though I am legally your wife, you have no more power over that than you would have if I were not. This relation gives you opportunity of making requests; nothing more. Because I am your wife no other man on earth has, or can have, such opportunity. While such an assumption on another's part would be an insult to me, I hold in my own hands the power to accede to your request or refuse it. And you must meet me on these terms. Harold, I implore you, for your own good, to see the justice of what I say, and show the respect due to the woman who is more than ever worthy to be your wife because she respects herself and refuses to be the bond-servant to physical necessity. It is this bondage I am repudiating, not you."

Various expressions passed over Harold Deering's face as Murva uttered these words in a low, quiet tone, but with an earnestness which vibrated in her voice and made him feel that she meant what she said.

"Since when have you seen yourself as this bond-servant and so signed your own proclamation of emancipation?" he asked. "Till very lately you have seemed contented enough."

"I do not know that I can tell, exactly, when I saw the matter as clearly as I do now. It seems to have been a slow growth with me, from dim perception, which

I first shut my eyes against because of a sense of duty, to a conviction which never leaves me night or day and forces me to act upon it. None of this growth, which has brought about my present attitude, has come from any fault in you as a husband, according to the accepted standard of what a husband should be. It is what is accorded to the position of husband and imposed upon that of wife, because of this ignorant belief in and slavish submission to physical necessity, that I rebel against, and because there is no law, ecclesiastical or civil, which can override the divine law I find in my own soul, and which shows me that freedom from it is mine by divine right; is that birthright which I will not sell for a mess of pottage, for that is all which this Satan of animal nature has to offer in return for it. I have always been content, I am content with you. You are my husband, my lover, the only one I love, now and always. Because you are my one and only love I demand the best, not the least, there is in you; and I would give to you in return, would be to you far more than I have ever been through higher perception of my own and your nature. As I desire your best I would give to you my best. Oh, Harold, my husband! Come, come with me up higher!" And she held out her tender arms to him, lifting her beautiful eyes all alight with soul-fire to his; and mingled with her wifely love was a touch of holy motherhood which brooded over him with heavenly meaning; but as yet he had no eyes with which to see it.

As she ceased it seemed to him as if he had been in this same situation before, had heard the same call and seen—Yes, there was that same light in her eyes! He remembered, all at once, the dream he had had the night after he had made up his mind to leave Millville

without seeing Murva Kroom. It was her form he had held in the strong grasp of the master, her eyes in which he had seen his own image fade out through tears. It was her voice that had called "Come!" It was her face he had seen among the trees, her eyes, freed from that image, which had sent forth the light by which he climbed the mountain. The hands on the dial of his life experience had moved forward over seven years for him that night. But, pshaw! What was a dream? Nothing that sensible people allowed themselves to be influenced by. He put this remembrance from him and his heart grew harder as he thought to himself that all this transcendentalism of his wife's resulted in one bald fact—a repudiation of her wifely duties, an inexcusable rebellion against his undeniable rights. She had said, herself, that he was blameless.

"I do not see," he began coldly, ignoring her entreating gesture, "that there is any need of change from what we have both been. I have been satisfied with you till now, and you admit that you can find no fault with me. I do not understand your present views or your warrant for entertaining them. You seem to me to have made yourself a female Don Quixote, tilting against windmills. There is nothing in your position or surroundings as my wife for you to fight against, and so you make war upon that which will overthrow you if you keep on. I can understand how a woman might take the stand you do if she were ill-treated and suffering from abuse. But I cannot understand why you, having, confessedly, no complaint to make, put yourself in this position of antagonism towards me, your lawful husband."

Murva sighed as he ceased speaking and began to

walk up and down the room, setting his heels decidedly at every step.

"Dear, I am trying to show you that it is the principle involved," she said.

"Principle!" he exclaimed furiously, turning as he spoke and coming rapidly toward her. "I did not marry a principle! I married you! The question is, are you going to do your duty as a wife, or are you not?"

Murva's heart was like lead within her as she saw the expression of his face. But hers was not a nature to quail when she acted from a conviction of right, and she answered steadily and firmly,

"I am going to do my duty as I see it, Harold, God helping me! Wait a moment," she continued, as he was about to speak. "If my view of my duty conflicts with your view of it you would say that I should, and must, act according to yours instead of my own; and this would be the consequence of your legal and authorised rights as a husband which, acceded to by me, would prevent any exercise of my own individuality, making me but your shadow. There is that within me which cries aloud against this, and because I see, at last only too well, that this position and authority of the husband toward and over the wife, as defined by law and common consent, has, for its foundation, the pernicious claim that the man's necessities require this absolute possession of the wife who is his helpmeet only when she recognises and acts according to this claim, so perpetuating the bondage it entails upon the human race. Wait a moment!" she exclaimed, as he attempted to speak. "Look into yourself, Harold! Examine your own feelings, and see if what I say is not true. You, like all men, are born into and brought up

in the conviction that a man has that nature which requires certain indulgences. These *must* be his. Both our religious and secular teachings make and defend this claim. It puts woman in a position of servitude inevitably, because only through her can he have this indulgence. It makes her the bond-slave of man as much as the black woman of the South was ever the slave of her master. There is no way out of this bondage except through her own determination and efforts; and that she will, at first, be crucified in the attempt for freedom is more than probable. Emancipation has ever been accomplished through struggle, and the battle which brings it as the victory is impossible so long as there is submission instead of resistance. The very fact that you are touched to the quick, that you are roused as you are when I assert my claim to individual freedom, body and all, even though a wife, proves the hold which this doctrine has upon mankind. You are angry because your rights are denied. Who or what gave you those rights? The law? When that concedes to the man as a right what, in its very essence, is the woman's wrong, because it takes from her the God-derived right of self-possession and self-government, it is an unjust law, and resistance to it is more honourable than submission. America has been, more than once, the battle-ground where resistance to oppression in the form of law has been successfully maintained and the victory which established independence gained. The hardest yet grandest battle, beside which those of the past are as nothing, is yet to come, and the army is to be of women. Their victory will be assured from the beginning, for that law which overrules the man-made law is on their side. Divine justice always wins at last. And as the righteousness of a cause is ever the most

powerful incentive and strongest support for those who do the fighting, this coming grand army of the republic will fight a bloodless battle because, when so arrayed, it will be invincible. The moment women see that refusal of man's right, as founded upon his physical necessity, is a God-inspired blow for freedom, both for them *and for him*, which can be won only through women themselves, and when they stand shoulder to shoulder in this effort, that moment the battle is won, for the weapons of the enemy are turned against him. If man's necessities *must* have the ministration which woman alone can afford, *he must accept her own terms for it.* Oh, I see now! I see the mistake, the fatal error which women make when they accept the position of bond-woman while that of free-woman is in their own hands to hold if they will! When they petition men to grant them their rights instead of taking and using these as they have the power to do! For myself, I will not longer be a Hagar, but I will be a Sarah!"

Murva had spoken more and more rapidly as she had proceeded till at the last she stood upon her feet, and her husband, momentarily overpowered by the intensity of her manner and words, had sunk into a chair. So they had changed positions, and he looked up at her with an indescribable mixture of expression. She seemed to have forgotten him and to be pouring forth her feelings unconsciously, her face wearing that exalted look, her eyes having that far-away sight usual to her in moments of great excitation. She stood for a moment thus, while Harold Deering spoke no word. He seemed to be experiencing a mental cyclone in which the only thing possible for him was to hold on.

As usual, she came slowly back to herself, and looked at him with a slightly bewildered expression, as if for

an instant she did not quite recognise her surroundings. Then she walked toward him and placed her hands upon his shoulders as he sat, saying, "My dear husband, I want to be more to you than I have ever been. I want to bear for you a son of promise instead of an Ishmael. Help me to this end for your own good, for that cannot be till it has ceased to be with me after the manner of women. This son is not born of bondage but of freedom; is not born because I must, but because I will."

For a moment they looked in each other's faces, hers strong, lofty and inspiring, his perplexed, doubtful and mistrusting.

"I cannot see what you mean, Murva," he said finally. "It seems to me that you are fighting something which does not exist and making me miserable because of it. The only thing I can clearly get at is that I am not to blame, and yet you are treating me as if I were a tyrant. I do not feel like making vicarious atonement for other men's sins when, by your own confession, I have committed none toward you. You are talking of justice and treating me very unjustly. And now," he went on, his feeling rising as he spoke, "I've got just one more thing to say to you at present. Are you going to share my room to-night?"

"No," said Murva, quietly, her hands falling from his shoulders to her sides.

"Do you understand what you are doing?" he demanded, starting up and putting his hands upon her shoulders, in his turn, with a stronger grasp than, in his excitement, he was aware of. "I am your lawful husband and you are my lawful wife. Your refusal is desertion. Do you hear?" and he shook her slightly as she stood calm and still before him.

"Yes, I hear," she answered, as quietly as before, but looking steadily into his eyes.

"Do you know that I could procure a divorce from you on this ground?" he went on still holding her fast.

"I know," she replied.

"And you dare me to this?" he demanded.

"I dare to maintain my own right!" was her answer; and her voice was as steady and as passionless as if she were incapable of emotion.

He drew his breath hard, with set teeth and quivering nostrils. For an instant the desire flamed up within him, and showed in his face, to crush her where she stood; to compel her to his will. He had the power, for he had the strength. So the brute and the angel confronted each other in silence. It was only for an instant, for from Murva, white and calm, the angel looked into the eye of the brute and conquered it. He turned from her and without a word left the room.

She heard him ascend the stairs and close the door of their room. As this sound met her ear her calm forsook her; trembling from head to foot, she sank on her knees and throwing her arms across a chair, bowed her head upon them and burst into a storm of tears. A very woman, strong when there was need for strength, weak enough when this need was removed, yet under her weakness keeping fast hold of her firm purpose. It was hard, hard. But it must be done. Could she do this if she did not love him? Had she loved him less she would have yielded. He was dear enough to her for her to crucify herself for him that there might be that resurrection which should be full compensation for its pangs.

And womankind was dear to her. Someone must open the way for the rest. If there were footprints to mark the way out of bondage others would follow in them. The deliverer was always the one who showed the way out by walking in it. The delivered were those who followed after.

As she knelt there, the violence of her emotion abated, and gradually she felt soothed and comforted. A passage in Isaiah came to her, bearing its meaning with it which she had not seen when it first met her eye during the examination of the Bible into which she had been led in her endeavour to know, for herself, what it taught in regard to woman.

"For the Lord hath called thee as a woman forsaken and grieved in spirit, and a wife of youth, when thou wast refused, saith thy God."

He deserted? Ah, no! She was forsaken? And because he did not yet know any better, had not grown old enough in knowledge of his own nature or hers. She had been the wife of his youth; she was yet to be the wife of his manhood. It was his ignorance, the ignorance of his youth that refused her; it must be her wisdom which should save him. But was she so called? From her heart went up the petition that she might know this beyond a doubt.

At she waited in the silence she seemed to hear a far-off sound which slowly swelled louder and louder into a wail, a sobbing, trembling wail that grew to a shriek of woe and despair. It rose and fell, dying slowly as if from lack of strength to continue: then burst forth as if a new pang had been added and silence was an impossible luxury. "'Tis the wail of your suffering sisters all over the world," said the voice of the silence; "'tis the cry of their hearts which goes up without ceasing,

night and day; those hearts that are fair and whole without, but are bleeding great drops of blood which fall unnoticed and unknown."

She seemed to see a great mulitude of hands. All around, in every direction, north, south, east, and west, they were stretching up till the earth was covered with them as a forest. Oh, the poor hands! Outreaching for something fast and sure to hold to! They groped here and groped there, seeking and finding not. They were wrung together in the agony which spoke through them with a power beside which words were naught. They relaxed and quivered and trembled as if with a palsying fear. They implored, they warned, they besought; they appeared raised to strike, but fell as if before a foe stronger than they against which it was useless to contend. Some were raised in prayer, so weak and tremulous, so gaunt and worn, that they seemed ready for their last friend, who alone could lay them calm and still as their prayer was answered. Everywhere the poor, poor hands; from everywhere the wail, the sob and the shriek; everywhere under it all the drop, drop, drop of the heart-blood upon something so hard that, as it struck, it spread because it could not sink in; spread and ran, seeking a hiding-place and finding none. And above the wail, the sob and the shriek sounded a voice like a trumpet, saying, "Thy sisters' blood crieth unto me." And immediately every hand of that great multitude, from north and south and east and west, pointed toward her.

CHAPTER XXV.

"NEW YORK, *April* 20th, 18—

"DR. DONALD CRAWFORD,

"MILLVILLE.

"MY DEAR FRIEND:—

"Will you, if possible, come to me at once? A great affliction has fallen upon me, and I look both to your professional and friendly advice for relief. You will understand how urgent is my need when I tell you that I fear my wife is insane. There is no suspicion that this is the case outside of my own, so far as I know. Come as if your arrival was unexpected and you intended simply to remain with us while attending to other duties, as usual. I shall await your coming with impatience.

"Yours sorrowfully,

"HAROLD DEERING."

Dr. Crawford sat in his private room with this letter open in his hand. He looked very serious, and appeared to be pondering deeply. "I wonder if this can be true," he thought. "Murva has always been in magnificent health and, so far as I have ever heard, there has been no insanity in her family unless her father's natural disposition and the indulgence of it could be called such. I cannot believe it. She is strong-minded in the best sense of the term, and could not lose her mental equilibrium easily. Well, I shall go and see."

"I must go to New York to-night," he said later to his wife. "I shall be away but two or three days at the longest, and will return sooner if possible. Have you any message for Murva and her husband?"

"Go to New York!" echoed Kate. "Oh, can I not go with you?"

"Not this time, dear," answered her husband gently. "The interval for preparation is too short. I am called professionally, and shall be much occupied while there, making too brief a stay for you to be thoroughly rested before undertaking the home journey. I shall not be away from you long, my darling." And putting his arms around her he pressed her head to his shoulder and kissed her tenderly.

Kate made no reply save the slight shadow which crept over her face, and which he attributed to disappointment because she could not bear him company. She offered no objection to his decision, but helped forward his preparations for going, willingly and seemingly, cheerfully.

Morning found him in New York, and he went directly to Harold Deering's residence, that gentleman answering his ring at the door.

"Why, good-morning, old fellow!" he said jovially. "You've taken us by surprise this time, but we are glad to see you!" continuing in an undertone, as Donald responded to his salutation, "I received your telegram saying you would come, and have been on the lookout for you. Not a word now," he added hurriedly, as Murva came from the breakfast-room into the hall.

"Why, Donald!" she exclaimed, "is it really yourself? And Kate is not with you?" This as she came forward and shook hands with him heartily.

"Not this time," answered Dr. Crawford. "I am

making only a flying trip and purpose to enjoy your hospitality for a day or two, if you will allow me."

"We are only too glad to see you at any and all times, and for as long as you will," returned Murva brightly. "Come and have some hot coffee. You are just in time." And she led the way to the breakfast-table.

During the meal Dr. Crawford, without seeming to do so and while chatting indifferently, observed Murva closely. He saw that she had changed since her visit to Millville. She was paler and not so round as then. This he could see, but there was another change whose nature he could not determine. In some indefinable way she was not the same woman, yet there were no indications, so far, of mental unsoundness. She seemed perfectly self-poised and entirely rational. But he knew better than to reach definite conclusions on insufficient evidence, and postponed judgment till he should see and hear more.

As they rose from the table Harold said, "If you have matters to be attended to immediately, Doctor, you will bear me company down town, will you not?"

"Precisely," answered Donald. "With this good breakfast as a foundation I am ready when you are."

An hour later found the two men closeted in Harold Deering's private office, where he gave the physician an account of his wife's late proceedings.

"How could any woman in her senses take such a stand as this without great provocation?" he demanded as he finished. "She must be insane. There is no other possible explanation for it that I can see."

Dr. Crawford did not reply immediately. He remembered his conversation with Murva when she had accompanied him on a drive and her persistence in questioning him, together with her manifest repugnance to

the declarations contained in his answers. He began to see that her present position, so far from being any sudden freak, was the consequence of something long contemplated and—knowing her as he did—a conviction reached. He began to see that this was possible; that this conclusion gave him, at least, a working hypothesis.

"When did you first observe the indications of any change in your wife?" he asked. "Try to remember."

After thinking a moment—"It was the last anniversary of our marriage," Deering replied. "I remember, now, that she seemed a little peculiar that evening and talked as I had never heard her before. She had always seemed thoroughly satisfied and happy, but at that time she remonstrated against being swallowed up in me, as she called it; she wanted room to think. Now doesn't that show a degree of mental unsoundness even then? What thoroughly rational woman could make such a plea?"

"What did you observe subsequently?" questioned Donald.

"As near as I can remember she seemed about the same as usual till after your visit to us, a little later. It was subsequent to your return home that she began to talk about the marriage relation and wanted to know what I thought of this and of that."

"Of what, specially?"

"Oh, she seemed particularly curious to know if I considered a wife's physical incapacity justifiable ground for what is usually termed unfaithfulness on the part of the husband." Dr. Crawford started perceptibly. "I remember that she persisted in questioning me till I admitted that a departure from the letter of the marriage law would be inevitable did such incapacity long

continue, because necessity would compel it; and that, in such case, no unfaithfulness to the wife would really exist. I noticed a decided change in her after that conversation, and the next day your telegram came and she went to Millville. Since her return the change I noticed then has gradually intensified, till now she refuses positively to sustain the relation of a wife to me."

"What reason does she give for her refusal?" asked Dr. Crawford.

"Oh, she says it's the principle involved!" answered Deering impatiently. "And surely this is a crazy notion, for the principle which governs marriage is that the wife should meet the needs of her husband. It is one which has obtained for generations, and will continue for generations to come, for it is founded upon human nature as it is, instead of upon a pretty sentiment about it."

"But is her refusal final? For all time? Does she make no concession whatever?" inquired Donald.

"Yes, she does make what she would call a concession, I suppose. She holds out the prospect of resumption of her wifely duties at her own convenience, after I have acknowledged what she considers her rights. But you see, this very demand on her part, this position which she assumes, this 'Accede to my terms or do without me,' is desertion of her husband and unjustifiable. To make the concession which she demands would be to occupy a position no self-respecting man could hold; would be to acknowledge that she was right when she is entirely wrong."

And Harold Deering began to walk nervously up and down the small space his office afforded.

"But if she is mentally unbalanced—which as yet I have not determined"—remonstrated Dr. Crawford,

as he saw the flush on the other's face, "she is not to be blamed, you know."

"No, that's so!" returned Deering. "Of course not! But I have been so harassed and wrought up over it all that I am getting very nervous myself. It touches a man in a tender spot when his rights as a husband are assailed."

"Do you think she mourns because she has no children?"

"No, I hardly think so. While I would have been glad if the one born to us had lived—it died shortly after birth, you know—I do not care specially for children, and would feel no loss if we had none. Murva knows this, and so need experience no uneasiness on my account. While some men would make it rather uncomfortable for their wives under such circumstances, I am satisfied to have her alone. I want my wife! I want her because I love her and because she is mine! And her taking herself from me like this is just using me up."

His voice showed emotion as he ceased. He had no lack of sympathy for himself. Would not most men's capacity for self-sympathy be taxed to the utmost if the one whose duty it is to minister to their needs could not see that they had any above her own?

"Do not take it too much to heart, old fellow," said Dr. Crawford kindly. "I have always found your wife to be a sensible woman, and I am sure that we shall find a way out of this. She, above all other women I have ever met, is capable of reaching a decision for herself and holding to a conviction of right in the face of any personal consequence. Knowing this we must proceed cautiously, for I think—though I do not say this positively; I must observe her further first—but I think

she has simply made up her mind that she ought to do what she is doing, and that she is suffering because of it as well as yourself. If this is so, the remedy will be found in showing her that she is mistaken in her view. If this can be done, the same strength of conviction and purpose will be exerted to make amends for what she is doing now. Because she is a strong woman she will be as strong for you as against you, once turn her that way. She is a grand woman, and worth any number of those who merely echo their husbands. She will be worth to you all it costs to win and hold her."

There was an unprofessional enthusiasm in Donald's words and voice, but Harold Deering did not seem to notice it. He was looking at his own deprivations, his own undeserved and unjust treatment, his wife's inexcusable dissatisfaction, and these bounded his range of vision. He continued his pacing of the floor as he said, "Perhaps she does want children, for she said something about bearing a son of promise instead of an Ishmael. What she meant by that I am sure I do not know, do you? It seems to me like another crazy notion."

Dr. Crawford could see a possible meaning, as he remembered that the son of promise was born of the free woman and the Ishmael of the bond woman, while the Master was the first "seed"; but he did not reply directly, saying only, "I will go back now and spend the afternoon with your wife. I shall be able, probably, to form an opinion by the time you come home. If I deem it wise, shall I let her know that I am acquainted with the circumstances?"

"Do just as you think best," answered Deering dejectedly. "If you find that she is all right and it is

only pure obstinacy on her part, I'll be eternally thankful to you for anything you can or will do to get her out of it."

"I'll do my best, Deering, for both your sakes," replied Dr. Crawford heartily; and with a warm hand-grasp he left him and took his way to Murva's home.

She met him with the sweet womanly graciousness so characteristic of her and which was destitute of the slightest tinge of what is usually understood as strong-mindedness.

"It is very good of you to come back in time for luncheon," she said. "Now you can tell me all about Kate and what is going on in Millville."

Donald answered her with some laughing allusion to woman's insatiable curiosity, and a little later joined her in the dining-room. Throughout the meal she was her old self in manner, and all the physician's watchful observance failed to detect the least symptom of mental aberration; yet he felt, more and more, that change in her which he had noticed on his arrival. "I have it!" he said at last to himself. "It is her naturally strong individuality which has become aggressive through being defensive; and behind this is the suffering woman striving to hide her suffering."

On their way back to the drawing-room, Murva caught her foot in the rug which lay just before the door, and although Dr. Crawford sprang forward to save her a fall he was but partially successful, her head striking the door-jamb with considerable force. But she rallied in an instant from the shock, and assured him that she was not hurt, walking steadily forward and continuing the remark she was making when the accident occurred. Donald could not help but notice the difference between Murva and many other women under

such circumstances ; where they would have been helpless from the blow, and would have required the attention of every one around them, showing, later on, more or less resentment if they did not get it, she did not seem to feel the need of help or desire for attention but, on the contrary, to be sufficient unto herself.

"She exhibits uncommon mental strength and power of self-control rather than any tendency to mental weakness and irresponsibility, I should say," he commented to himself.

An hour had passed, during which he had observed her every word and look, and he was wondering how he should introduce the subject of the strained relations with her husband, thinking that her subsequent conversation and deportment would unfailingly show if there was anything to fear, when she turned to him suddenly, looked him squarely in the face and said, "My husband sent for you to come here and perform the office of a trusted family friend. When are you going to begin ?"

Donald was taken completely unawares as she had previously given no hint, either by word or act, that she had the least suspicion as to his visit being other than it purported to be. But he rallied quickly and asked, half-laughingly, "How do you know that? Are you a clairvoyant ?"

"I do not know how I know it," she answered as pleasantly, "but I do know it."

Dr. Crawford rapidly reviewed the situation, and saw Murva might divine that, from their old and strong friendship, Harold Deering would naturally be led to look to him for advice ; and without dreaming for a moment of her husband's opinion of her mental condition. He must take care that she did not know of it,

if he would have the best opportunity for his observations.

"Well, Murva, you are right," he answered frankly. "Harold honors me by his confidence in my friendship, and knowing how highly I regard you he has confided to me the present relation you hold to each other. I trust that you also have confidence enough in me to know that the only desire I could have in the matter would be to help you both equally, in so far as any third party can help you."

"Indeed I know that, Donald," responded Murva heartily, "and no one could be more thankful than I, if it were possible for you to help us through this difficulty. But is it?"

"Tell me first, what induced you to separate yourself from your husband?" he said.

"I have not separated myself from him," she answered quietly.

"Not!" ejaculated Dr. Crawford. "Why, he told me——"

"He told you that I had refused to hold certain relations with him, did he not?"

"Yes."

"Did he tell you why?"

"He told me that you held some views at present which he could not account for. But I would rather you would tell me, if you will."

"I refused because I felt that a longer compliance with an unjust demand was a wrong to myself."

"Why, Murva, I never dreamed that you had any cause of complaint against your husband!" exclaimed her listener.

"Neither have I. My complaint is against a husband's position; against his self-claimed and generally

conceded rights; it is against my own husband only so far as he is identified with these. According to his view of what a husband should be, he is a most exemplary one. I have outgrown his view, that is all."

He was watching her narrowly, but she was perfectly calm. There was not the least trace of excitement in her manner, nor even of strong feeling.

"I must ask you to explain more fully," he said.

"Perhaps you may remember," she continued, "that during my last visit to Millville I asked you, as a physician, some questions pertaining to what are called the physical needs. At that time I had come to have the opinion that the present basis for the marriage relation and parenthood was not the best or the wisest, if it were —as it seemed to be—founded more upon the physical than the higher nature of men and women. But I wanted to make no mistake, and so asked you what I did that I might be sure of my ground. At that same time I consulted with Mr. Melton also, that I might have authoritative information as to religious teachings upon this same subject. I found that each of you confirmed the other and my own fears as well. Had not my own instincts been too strong to allow of it, I suppose I should have accepted the situation after this experience; but, instead, I have been impelled to act upon my own solitary conviction. I cannot see, and do not believe, that a man's physical necessities are what they are claimed to be, or that these should rule the marriage relation. The medical science and the religion which teach this, are, to me, the two thieves on the cross between whom hung that master of self who proved them such; proved that these filched from man's divine inheritance that which they never could restore. Manhood and womanhood, singly and in

unity, have a dignity and a power which lifts them above that plane. Medical science does not yet reveal the true man; our common religion does not yet reveal the true Christ."

As she ceased, he saw that her face wore the expression he remembered to have seen years ago when Kate used to laughingly call her to "Come back." "And so——" he said suggestively.

"And so," she continued, "this is what I am now convinced of. There is no justice or right in the claim that a man's needs require submissive wifely ministration, and compliance is at the expense of the needs of the woman, which have no recognition in this claim. It is her duty to recognise her own and to perform the office of true helpmeet to her husband by leading him to higher ground, which she cannot do so long as she passively accepts what custom and tradition entail upon her. It is her sacred duty to claim her own right to herself as paramount to all man's claim upon her, for she can discharge the truest and highest obligations of wife and motherhood only through first recognising the obligations of her womanhood. The truer and stronger the woman, the better the wife and mother. This being my conscientious conviction I claim my right to myself and repudiate my husband's right to me, as he at present views it. The first belongs to the woman; the other is the product of that perverted view belonging to mankind, consequent upon ignorance, which is represented in his person. And the consequence is that not till he views me in this way, acknowledges that my person is my own, not his, and that he, as my husband, has a right which none other can possess, the right to request, but not to demand, will I resume the relations now suspended. He says I have deserted him. Others

would probably say the same. I feel that he has deserted me, for I ask only justice. But in time, his manhood will accord this; it is only his sense-nature which now refuses it. I can wait."

"Who or what has influenced you, Murva, that you hold views so different from general ones, so diametrically opposed both to our active and tacit education?"

"No one has influenced me," she replied. "My only teachers have been experience and observation, and these have but developed in me what was latent there, what is latent in all women; and, surely, this is a more comprehensive education than that which merely inculcates doctrine. What do we live for if not to learn, to improve upon our fathers?"

"Then perhaps you do not now think that love should be the ruling motive for and ruling element in marriage," he asked, watching her closely.

And now Murva's calm was broken. The quickened blood showed through the pallor of her face, she started erect in her chair, every part of her body tense with feeling, her eyes shone with a light which never could have been kindled at the torch of animal desire, as she exclaimed, "How can you say that? How can you think it for a moment? Am I not striving to elevate my own marriage to the plane of love by lifting it above that passion which masquerades under its name? For it is passion, mainly, passion with but little true love, that is the stronger element in most marriages, and is responsible for so much subsequent misery. True love is self-denying. Passion absorbs everything into itself. With the same spirit which actuated Madam Roland I could declare, Oh, Love! How many crimes are committed in thy name! All my life I have longed for love, longed to love; and not till I have experienced

that which is called love have I found what love really is; found that it is that heavenly, silvery flame which the red fire of passion makes almost invisible; but which endures, growing fuller and brighter when that has burned itself out and naught is left but ashes. It is because I will have love, only, as the soul of my marriage, because I know that my husband will yet wake out of the distortions of his sense-dream to this realisation, that I persevere now as I do, in the face of his disappointment and misjudgment. To me marriage is holy, is a sacrament, is an altar upon which is kept alive a never-dying flame which leaps ceaselessly upward to its source. But because passion is mistaken for love, marriage is too generally the means for unlimited self-indulgence at the expense of the wife's health and peace; and this, which makes of her the lowest possible servant, is called the expression of love. Put aside the physician for the moment, Donald, put aside the theories which are dignified with the name of truth; put aside the religious dogma which claims to be the teaching of the Nazarene, but is not, and, looking into your own soul, ask of that divinity which you will find enshrined there if this is not true."

As Donald listened to her, from some unexplored deep in his nature there sprang an assent to what she said, almost against his will; for, if other women should follow this example from the same conviction, what would become of society? What an overturning and upheaval there would be! One beside which the consequences threatened by other aimed at social reforms would be as nothing. And yet there was something grand and inspiring in it. She looked like one inspired as she sat opposite him, gazing directly in his face without the least sense of unfitness, with no suggestion of

unwomanly boldness, but, instead, the strong and efficient self-reliance which came from pure, honest, and high motive and endeavour.

"I can see," he replied finally, "that what you conceive and hold to is grand as an ideal, but I cannot see how it is to find place among the actual, stubborn facts. And one of these is, Murva, that if you hold to your present position you have deserted your husband. Mind, I do not say this in any spirit of personal condemnation, but only to show you your actual position as opposed to your ideal one. Neither the law nor society takes cognizance of high ideals; and the conduct regulated by these will be condemned by them unsparingly if it is contrary to what they have established as the standard. Both law and society—religion as well—will condemn you, and uphold him in his demand for his rights. These will say, as he does, that if you truly loved him you could not persist in holding your present position. Would it not be better to yield the point, and so restore harmony between yourself and your husband than to go on in what will only hurt you and accomplish nothing?"

"Donald," replied Murva, quietly but impressively, "I never loved my husband as I have loved him since I came to see and reach out to his higher nature. I love him and him only; I love him for all time and eternity, for it is his soul, not his person, that I love; it is what he is, not what he seems, that is mine and mine only, and to which I belong as utterly. He is the one man in this ~~world and~~ the next for me. The love and loyalty I plighted him on our marriage day is nothing to the love and loyalty I pledge him now with my opened vision; pledge with all my heart and soul and spirit; pledge with that promise which I will keep now

and for ever. Whatever he may do henceforth he is my husband and I am his wife, through a stronger bond than either law or society can make or sanction. Sometime—I do not now see when—he will know this, and come to claim his own. I am not deserting him! Oh, no! I am waiting for him."

"If this is your final decision, Murva,—and I respect your conviction, whether I agree with it or not—I can accomplish nothing by remaining longer, and so will return home to-night. But, with all my heart, I hope that you may bring your husband to your view if you cannot give up your own. If I could help you——"

"Oh, Donald," exclaimed Murva, starting up and seizing his hand, "help my husband! Help him to see what I know you can see in some measure, whether you admit it or not. I do not need help, but he does, so much. Do all you can to show him that his present loss is but his future gain if he will have it so."

"I will tell him what I honestly think, that if he can bring himself to your position it is a higher and better one than the old. But I tell you, as frankly, that I fear it will be useless. I know human nature too well."

"Donald, is it not perverted human nature—perverted through self-indulgence—that comes under your and every physician's observation more than human nature in its purity?" asked Murva.

"Perhaps so!" he answered with a sigh. "It is the fact to be dealt with nevertheless. And now"—moving toward the hall—"I am going back to your husband, and then shall take the evening train for home. Be sure of one thing: however this matter ends you have my unfailing sympathy and respect." And taking her hand in his he bowed over it reverently, touching it lightly with his lips. A moment later he had left the house.

CHAPTER XXVI.

"So your judgment is that my wife's mental condition is perfectly sound?"

"I see no indications of aberration: on the contrary, she seems mentally strong to an unusual degree."

Dr. Crawford and Harold Deering were once more in the latter's private office, and the physician had just given him an account of his interview with Murva. Her husband heard the report with a gloomy face, which showed that he derived neither comfort nor hope from the recital.

"Then it is pure obstinacy on her part, and nothing else," he exclaimed; "and by —— she shall learn that I am master yet."

He struck his clenched fist upon the desk before him as he spoke, and his face grew more forbidding than ever. Dr. Crawford watched him in silence for a moment. He felt that the chances for unity upon Murva's conditions were very small and—now that he had seen her—the chances for it upon any other, far less. But he must do all that friendship demanded of him as he could see the opportunity.

"Let me tell you one conclusion I have reached in my observation of your wife," he said quietly, without seeming to notice the other's excitement. "I am convinced that she is suffering acutely, for all her calm and self-possessed manner. She is a woman whose feel-

ings are not on the surface, but way below that, whose nature is strong and rich in the higher instead of the emotional sentiments, who is capable of clear thinking and reasoning, and honest enough to admit and stand by a conclusion which she reaches in this way. Consequently it is with her next to impossible to give up such an one, and easier—hard as that is—to compel herself to act in accordance with it. This she can do, though she suffer intensely in the doing, and I am confident that this is the case with her now. Do not misjudge her, Harold, for this is costing her more than you or any one has any idea of, I believe."

"But what is the need of it all!" broke out Harold Deering. "She is making me miserable, positively unfitting me for business, so that I can attend to nothing as I should, and all for what? A mere whim of her own which she calls maintaining her individual right; as if a wife could have any rights which were not identical with her husband's. I tell you things would come to a pretty pass if a man should allow any such nonsense. The political rights which discontented and unsexed women are clamouring for are nothing to this, for only such women would join in that clamour. But this demand made general, would bring rebellion right to a man's own door. Don't you see that while those other women petition for what they want, these would take it without so much as 'by your leave?' In heaven's name what should we come to? I am nearly crazy myself when I think how I have been deceived in my wife if she is entirely responsible for what she is doing. I have always been so thankful that she had no tendency to become one of the modern agitators, but this is worse, far worse."

"Harold! I think your view of your wife's position

makes it worse than it really is. Could you not concede what she asks? If I understand her, this concession would restore harmony between you?"

Harold Deering turned himself about and faced Dr. Crawford in astonishment.

"Why, man alive!" he exclaimed, "do you know what she demands? It is an entire abdication of my rights! Do you hear? Of my rights as a husband and as a man. What man in his senses could make such a concession? It is his manhood that is in question. Give that away! Well, hardly! If she really loved me she could not ask such a thing."

"Harold, I do not believe that there is a man on earth loved more devotedly than you are at this moment by your wife!" declared Donald warmly.

"She has a mighty queer way of showing it then," returned Deering sulkily. "That's all I can say."

Dr. Crawford could not help but see the transformation wrought in Harold Deering since he had met him last in Millville: could not help but see that it was a coming to the surface of something previously hidden. The courtly, genial gentleman was displaced with what seemed, by comparison, coarse, selfish, violent, vindictive. What had wrought the change? Was it a natural development through the presence of adequate conditions? Would most men show this change under like conditions? Were these made simply by the refusal to accord legal and customary rights? Was it the uncontrolled brute coming to the surface?

He did not like the view, did not care to answer his own questions. The contrast afforded by Murva's calm dignity and resolute purpose was very striking, and an argument without words. But it seemed quite clear to him that he could do nothing and must leave

matters to adjust themselves. He looked at his watch and rose to his feet, placing a friendly hand upon Harold Deering's shoulder, as he sat before him, and said,

"My friend, with all my heart I wish that I could arrange this difficulty for both your sakes. But it is impossible. It is a matter which concerns you two alone, and only you two can settle it. You need have no fears in regard to your wife. She is fully cognizant of and responsible for what she does. I can only say to you, do nothing hastily. Think carefully and act slowly, remembering that you have a woman honest in purpose and strong in conviction to deal with, one who, I firmly believe, loves you as only such a nature can love. And now good-bye; let me hear from you soon, and I shall hope for the most favourable news."

Harold Deering rose slowly and heavily to his feet. "Good bye," he said as he did so. "You know that I an very thankful to you for coming, and I suppose you have done all you can. What is going to become of me I am sure I don't know. I feel very much like going to the devil."

"But you will do nothing of the kind," said Dr. Crawford decidedly. At that moment he was struck by the weakness of a nature which could depend upon a woman to keep it what it should be, as he had never been before. And yet he knew that this dependence was by no means exceptional. He had seen more than one woman marry a man to save him. He had seen many another sacrifice herself utterly and uselessly to save a man after she had married him. And he knew that the general verdict in Harold Deering's case, did he act as he intimated, would be that his wife's conduct had ruined him.

"You will act as it becomes a man under all circumstances," he continued. And with another warm grasp of his hand, he left him.

When Harold Deering returned to his home that night, his face wore an expression of resolve which Murva noticed at once; and she felt that her husband had determined upon some course which he would soon make known. There was no deviation from her customary gentleness of manner. Ever since the day she had announced her determination she had been more then ever careful, if that were possible, to discharge scrupulously every duty devolving upon her. Not the smallest detail of her household escaped her careful oversight, not a single look or manner of her own could be construed as showing the least disregard for her husband's comfort or wishes. However he received it, she was unceasingly kind, even tender and loving, showing him plainly, had he eyes to see it, that her feelings toward him had in nowise changed, and that her only desire was to meet her own ideal of what a wife should be.

Her husband's manner was cold and hard, as if he had steeled himself against her, so that nothing she should say or do should alter his purpose. During the dinner hour he returned the barest answer which civility required to all her efforts at conversation, and Murva was sure that a crisis in their mutual relations had come.

She had not long to wait for enlightenment. When they entered the room where they usually spent the evening, her husband did not take his customary seat, but began to pace up and down the floor instead. She felt an almost overpowering oppression, a sense of heaviness which was almost a physical pressure, so that it

was with effort that she breathed. It seemed as if she were carrying a heavy load, which was slowly crushing her down to the ground, and she was powerless to resist or cry out against it. She waited in silence for what was to come.

After a few minutes he ceased walking and sat down opposite her.

"Murva," he said, "I ask you once more, and for the last time, to recognise and perform your wifely duties."

"With all my heart, Harold," she replied, "if it is made possible for me."

She saw the anger flame up within him at once, but he controlled it and went on.

"I do not wish to go over all that old ground again. A repetition of what you have formerly said is not desirable now. I want from you a plain Yes or No; and I advise you, for your own sake, to think well before you reply."

Think well! What had she been doing for months? Heavier and heavier grew the oppression upon her till it seemed as if she had no voice with which to reply. She felt as if she were sinking slowly to where it was very cold, down, slowly down, out of sight. Her husband's voice, sounding as if it came from a distance, roused her and began to bring her back.

"Well! I am waiting for your answer!" he said.

"Then I must reply, No, not on the old basis," she replied slowly and with difficulty.

As he heard this the restraint he had put upon himself vanished. The rigidity of his face and form broke up in the wave of fury which swept over him, and clinching one hand he shook it over his head as he almost shouted, "Then there is but one way to bring

you to your senses, and by heavens, I'll take it. You are no longer a wife of mine. Leave my house!"

What! Murva sprang to her feet as with an electric shock, only to drop back in her chair dazed and stunned as the full meaning of these words broke upon her. Leave her home! He could not mean it.

She turned her white face toward him, striving for the speech of which she was for the moment incapable. He returned her look with one of unfeeling determination.

"You do not mean it, Harold! Oh, my husband, you do not mean it!" she almost whispered.

"But I do mean it," he said defiantly. "You have made me miserable long enough with your whims and your obstinacy, and I am not going to stand it any longer. Either you submit to me, your lawful husband, or go."

Go! Go where? Where could she go? If this were not her home she had none. Swiftly before her, as before a drowning person, passed the time when she had been sent out from her only home. Was this the price she had again to pay for freedom? Then, the hand held forth to receive it had been stricken helpless ere she had got well away from the threshold. What would come to the one now raised to thrust her out? Oh, nothing! No harm! No harm to the husband she loved. Anything for her! Anything that must be, but no affliction for him. Yet, it was to cost her dear, the love and the freedom for which, all her life, she had longed. Were these really not to be found in the world of men? Were her efforts to be made in vain?

"Where do you wish me to go, Harold?" she asked feebly.

"That is at your own option, as a matter which con-

cerns only yourself. I shall get a divorce from you on the ground of desertion when a sufficient time has elapsed. I will not have a wife who is one in name only, and who lives a lie." And there was no sign of yielding in his hard, determined manner.

Was the result of an honest effort to live to the truth, a seeming lie? Murva tried to collect her tumultuous thoughts and concentrate her attention upon the present moment and what it held for them both, feeling instinctively that upon her action in this crisis much depended. She saw that her husband was embittered and temporarily maddened by what his aroused feelings prevented him from understanding, and that she must make every concession possible without a sacrifice of the principle she was conscientiously striving to maintain. She could feel him waiting for further words from her, keeping his wrath hugged closely to him, with no intention of parting with it. She compelled herself to say, as quietly as she had at first spoken,

"This house is yours, Harold. If you command me to leave it, I will do so. When do you wish me to go?"

"To-night!" was on his lips, sent there by the furious impulse which had impelled him this evening; but there was enough manliness yet active in him to restrain it, and he did not answer at once. Murva waited with her eyes full of unutterable love and longing fixed upon him, saying again for her all she had before tried to tell him and tried in vain.

He made as if to reply, but hesitated, then seemed to come to a sudden decision.

"You need not go till you can locate yourself properly, and I will give up the house to you till that is done, for I will live with you in this way no longer."

He rose as he spoke and left the room, going immediately up the stairs before she had opportunity to reply.

Left alone, Murva seemed able to shake off some of the weight which oppressed her and began to feel the sting and smart of this blow. Could she do it? Could she pay this price demanded of her? Was it worth the cost? Could she face the world with this stigma upon her? For her position as separated from her husband would be, in itself, a stigma which would cause many to shun her, even though the circumstances which led to it were unknown, even though they, if known, were in no wise discreditable to her. Could she go out from her home, seeing no more her husband's face? Go into loneliness and exile and—wait?

Ought she to go without one more effort with him—for him, as well as for herself? She would make another! She would try just once more to show him how, not only with her whole heart, but with her soul, she loved him, loved him only! How she was doing what she did for his dear sake, that he might be more a man and less a creature of sense-desire; more a master and less a servant.

She heard him descending the stairs, and her heart beat rapidly with the reaction in her feelings. With her hands upon the arms of her chair, she was all ready to spring to her feet and meet him with the look, touch and word which would win him to hear her again, when she heard the outer door close. Astonished, she listened for his step, and heard the sound of moving wheels, which stopped, and then went on again. She sprang to the door and looked into the hall. No one was there, and her husband's coat and hat were gone.

She ran to the outer door and half way down the

steps. No one was on the sidewalk in either direction, and a cab was rapidly disappearing in the distance. As the fact that her husband had left her broke over her in all its awfulness, she sank down upon the stones, hearing as she crouched there the noise of the wheels growing less and less, till it ceased altogether. She had no sense of how long she remained there. She was aroused by the step of a servant at the open door, and realised the necessity of keeping the household in ignorance of what had happened quickly enough to stand up and say, as he came forward on to the upper step,

"I heard a noise in the street, and came out to see what it was, as Mr. Deering went. He has been called away suddenly, and will not be at home to-night. Be careful about fastening up the house, John."

When alone again, doubly alone, came a time of wrestling with this new sorrow. Covering it up within her as much as possible, that nothing might be suspected, she compelled herself to accept the situation and be ready to act accordingly. She felt that all that was possible for her now was to go away, felt that her husband would not return till she did. If this cup of pain might not pass from her except she drank it, then she must drink. Hard as it was for her, she knew that his pain would be the greater when he should wake to the realisation of what he had done; for now he was as one asleep and fighting the phantoms of his feverish and restless dream. When that dream had worn itself out, he would look for her where she belonged, and, not finding her, finding instead that he had driven her forth when he did not know what he was doing, he would suffer, suffer without ceasing, till he had found her and atoned. That he would find her, that he would gravi-

tate toward her as naturally and as surely as he breathed, she knew; knew it positively, even though he had renounced and deserted her; for she knew that he was bound to her with a stronger bond than that of sense-desire, and that sooner or later the divine nature in him would arise and claim its own. She knew that with this nature he loved her now; loved her even when he bade her begone; knew that they belonged to each other, and that nothing could keep them apart.

She spent a sleepless night. While all around her slept, she wrestled. For all her strong spirit, she could have shrieked aloud in her agony. For herself alone she would not have endured it. It would have been easier to yield; but it was for him. It was to save the one given her out of all the world to save, through helping him to save himself. It was to help him put out the mark of the beast, and bring forth the image of God instead. This would be worth all it cost.

Not till daylight began to weave its grey veil in her room was she able to decide as to her course. She would go to Millville, would leave home as she always did when going there; her open departure would prevent any suspicion in her household. She would act in every detail so as to leave everything as easy for her husband as possible, so that he could send for her to come back if he should relent, and the servants be none the wiser as to why she went away.

But a new complication arose. Not till now had it occurred to her how she should live. All her thought and feeling had been absorbed in the struggle to see that she must go, then where to go. She had no money beyond the comparatively small amount then in her pocket-book. What she might have had as an inherit-

ance from her father she had resigned to her step-mother. Yet she was far richer than when she had been sent forth into the world before. She had plenty of clothing, what jewelry she possessed was valuable, while her laces represented a large sum. She could live for a time till she was able to take up some definite occupation or—till her own should come to her. In her lonely girlhood days she had derived a small comfort from the words, "Stand fast in the eternal ways, and what is yours will come to you." These recurred to her now, and, more than then, they comforted her and helped her to say, "I will."

She announced to the servants her intention of going to Millville on the noon train, making, meanwhile, all arrangements, and giving the directions for what should be done on her husband's return, so that he would find his household just the same in all its details, with the exception of her absence; and this would be, so far as the servants were concerned, the same as always when she went to Millville. She was accustomed to take but one trunk, and the removal of her whole wardrobe would seem strange, and set the servants to wondering. She must leave a part of it for that reason.

By noon her preparations were complete, and she was ready to be driven to the depôt. She could not trust herself to say good-bye to her home in her own heart even. She compelled herself to look upon her going away as she had led her servants to look upon it as long as she was under their observation. She had thought of leaving a note for her husband where he only would find it, but, after weighing the matter well, she felt that her wisest course was silent submission. She would yield, without a word, to every decision of his but the one which conflicted with her God-derived

right to herself. Sooner or later he would see what it was impossible to tell him now, though she wrote letters by the score; and her silent and prompt acquiescence in his demand would speak louder for her than she could for herself.

To all outward appearance she was the happy wife and woman who was going for a brief visit to her old friends, as she descended the steps of her house to the carriage waiting for her. All the underlying strength of her nature, far more than she knew she possessed till the demand was made upon it which proved the supply, was called up to carry her through this ordeal; and it was with a firm, pleasant voice that she gave the final directions to the servants, said "good-bye" to them, and drove away.

She was returning to the place she had left as the house of bondage, from which she had gone forth with its brand upon her face to that love and freedom which had always been denied her. Now she was turning back from these with a deeper brand than the old one upon her, one seared upon her heart, while that had been only upon her face. It had been without, where all could see and know its meaning and sympathise with her. This was in that hidden within, where none but herself could know how it was put there, could know that it was the mark of a bondage more far-reaching and deadly than the old, for in that she had, at least, the right to herself, the right to be alone.

The love and freedom she had ever sought, and believed herself then to have at last found, were yet before her, and she had yet to follow on to the finding; while the marks upon the body but registered the cost of that which was more than the body, and which was gained by its crucifixion.

CHAPTER XXVII.

MURVA received the warm welcome which was always sure for her from Kate and her parents whether her arrival was expected or not. She gave them no explanation of her sudden appearance other than to say that, her husband being absent from home, she thought she would come and visit them for a few days. She believed that by this means the way would be open for her return, should her husband relent, without any of the true circumstances being known. And if he did not she could still tell them as much of the truth as was necessary.

Dr. Crawford was absent when she arrived, but his look when he met her the next morning showed her that he divined the truth. He acted upon her explanation to the family, however, and there was no opportunity for any private conversation before going to his regular duties. He laughingly bade his wife take good care of Murva,—who, with all her determination to bear the situation silently and uncomplainingly, was looking pale and worn,—and departed. But his face changed as he turned his back upon the house, and he said half-aloud, as he went on, "Poor girl! poor girl!"

When he returned at noon Murva was standing at one of the windows looking out, with a face which she did not show to those within. She did not seem to feel the need of changing it for him. She knew that he knew.

As he came in, he saw that she was alone. Drawing a letter from his pocket he said: "I received this to-day from your husband," and handed it to her.

As Murva took it in her hand and saw her husband's well-known handwriting, her heart gave a bound, the tears rushed to her eyes, and she sat down quickly on the nearest chair, holding it tightly the while. But it was addressed to Dr. Crawford, not to her. "Shall I read it?" she asked, looking at him.

He nodded assent, and she took out the enclosure. As she opened it a slip of paper fell in her lap. She picked it up and saw that it was a check for a large amount of money, payable to her order. She read the letter.

NEW YORK, *May* —, 18—.

"DR. DONALD CRAWFORD,

"MILLVILLE.

"MY DEAR FRIEND:—

"Will you be kind enough to hand the enclosed check to Mrs. Deering? And believe me ever,

"Truly yours,

"HAROLD DEERING."

That was all. Murva did not realise how strongly she had expected that he would relent almost immediately, till now. All her hope fled, and a cold desolation took possession of her instead. She experienced no sense of relief in the possession of money; the desolation swallowed up everything else. "A woman forsaken and grieved in spirit, and a wife of youth when thou wast refused." The money was not for what she was, but for what she had been: a recognition and reward for past service. She was paid. He was through with her.

"I did not mean to let them know," she said faintly, looking up at Donald, "but now it does not matter."

"Murva!" he exclaimed, "this cannot be kept secret from your friends or from the world. What explanation are you going to give of it?"

"My husband and I have separated by mutual agreement; that is all," she replied, in the same low, weak voice, without changing her position.

"But people will ask questions," persisted Donald.

"There is not a word to be said against my husband," answered Murva, and this time her voice was strong and clear, though still low in tone, "not one word! He is blameless, for he believes he is right."

"Oh, Murva," Donald exclaimed, as he noted her ready defence of her husband, "could not this have been prevented?"

"Unfortunately, no; for I too believe that I am right. Oh, Donald,"—with a quick change of manner—"could I bear this if I did not know that I am right? Did I not have that assurance which never leaves me night or or day and compels me to act according to my convictions?"

As she looked up at him with her hands tightly clasped and half-raised in her earnestness, Kate came into the room. Murva's attitude and the sorrowful sympathy in her husband's face brought her at once to her friend's side.

"Oh, Murva, what is it?" she said.

Murva looked at her, then put her arms round her, and leaning her head against her, said gently, "I came to you once before, dear, when I had no home, and now I come again. You will take me in for a little while, till I make one for myself, will you not?"

"No home!" ejaculated Kate. "Whatever does she mean, Donald?"

"Murva and her husband have separated by mutual agreement," he replied slowly.

"Separated!" Kate gasped. "Why—why—what has he done?"

"Nothing, Kate! Nothing at all. He is my dear husband, who is blameless. Only—for some reasons—we are better apart for a time. Remember, Kate, that all who shall know of this are to know that my husband has done nothing wrong. That we have separated for reasons concerning ourselves only. You will remember, won't you?" persisted Murva.

"Of course I will, but it seems very strange. Why, Murva, how could he let you go?" and Kate looked at her wonderingly. "But never mind," she continued, as she saw a quiver pass over Murva's face, "do not talk about it now, but tell me as much or as little as you please by-and-bye. You are here, and you shall stay here, and be my sister as you used to be." And she laid her cheek very tenderly against the other, now nearly as white as her own; for Kate was even more frail than she had been when at Murva's home.

Murva kissed her tenderly, and rising slowly to her feet said, "Will you please tell your father and mother? I do not feel as if I could talk of it to-day, and, if you will forgive me, I will go to my room. I do not wish for dinner and I shall be better alone."

Kate was about to expostulate, but her husband's hand on her arm restrained her, and in silence Murva left the room, carrying the letter in her hand.

Kate looked at her husband, and her husband looked at her.

"Donald Crawford, do you know what the matter is?"

"Kate Crawford, I think I do. But we will not talk of it just now. Come to dinner." And he led her away.

Great was the amazement of the good minister and his wife when Donald imparted the information to them, though after the first surprise Mr. Melton became very thoughtful, and did not appear to notice the surmises of his wife as to what the trouble between Murva and her husband might be; while Donald finally, after debating the matter with himself, said, "I think I understand the cause of their separation, and it is a matter which must adjust itself. All we can do is to take as good care of Murva as possible for the time being, and we know that she is worthy of all we can bestow upon her."

Mr. Melton nodded silent acquiescence, while Mrs. Melton reflected that, if Donald knew, Kate would soon know, and if Kate, then she would be likely to know something too; so she gave forth no more surmises.

Alone in her room Murva was drinking the dregs of the cup held to her lips. Not till she could say, "It is finished," did she come forth from thence. And when she did come forth, her face showed the victory she had won. The cross had fallen from her shoulder and she stood erect, while captivity was led captive.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

A FEW weeks after Murva's arrival in Millville, as she was out for one of the long walks alone she was so fond of, she found herself in the neighbourhood of John Wilson's old home. It looked familiar, and brought back to her quite vividly much that he had said during her visits to him. She realised all at once that his words had indirectly affected the rest of her life, for they had led her to look within herself, to search and question the depths of her own nature, to heed her own natural instincts as worthy of attention, instead of trusting entirely to what was declared to her as truth because so labeled.

She remembered his belief that the life hereafter was a continued progress, and wondered to herself if he was "climbing that other mountain." As she looked down the street toward the house, she saw a woman come out of the small garden and walk toward her. As they came nearer together something about the woman seemed familiar, and when they were abreast she looked directly into her face. An instant and they had passed each other, but in that instant Murva remembered, and, turning quickly, she stepped to the other's side saying, "Is not this my old friend, Haddie Wilson?"

The woman half stopped, as if she were undecided whether it were not best to go on, but as Murva held

out her hand she finally halted and met it, somewhat reluctantly, seemingly, with her own.

"I am Haddie Wilson," she said briefly.

"I am glad to see you again, Haddie, after all these years," went on Murva in a tone of kindly, friendly interest, in which was not the least trace of condescension.

"Are you?" replied Haddie as briefly as she had before spoken, but with a rising inflection and a look which showed a mistrust of Murva's words as the utterance of a polite insincerity.

"Indeed I am," repeated Murva, pressing her hand warmly, though now she remembered the confirmation of the rumors in Millville which she had received from Dr. Crawford at the time he saw Haddie in the hospital, and which had not occurred to her at the first moment of meeting.

"Perhaps you would not be if you knew more about me," said Haddie, looking Murva squarely in the face, and withdrawing her hand from the other's clasp as she spoke.

"I do not forget what I already know," said Murva. "We were girls together, and then you had burdens heavy for young shoulders to bear. I do not forget that any one of us may fail in a moment of weakness and great temptation to do what duty demands of us; neither do I forget, what only lately I have learned to remember, that no one of us lives to himself alone, but that our lives are bound together by our common humanity, and that to ignore this bond is but to our own loss. I should like to know more of you if you will allow me. Are you stopping in Millville? May I come and see you?"

While Murva had been speaking Haddie Wilson had

never moved her eyes from her face, and the hard expression of her own lessened a little as she listened. She continued her searching look for a moment after Murva ceased, saying, finally, as if compelled to make a reluctant admission to herself, "I really believe she means it."

Murva smiled quietly. "I am not in the habit of saying what I do not mean," she said.

"You're one in a million then," retorted Haddie quickly, and her face hardened again. "No, I am not stopping in Millville," she went on. "I came here only to—to—because I had a longing to see the old place"—this half defiantly—"and now I am going back again, so you can't come to see me. But you don't live here, do you?"

"Only for the present," said Murva. "I could tell you something of your uncle. I was with him the day he died, and the last words he said to me were about you."

The hard, steely eyes softened a little and she turned her head away so that her face could not be seen.

"If you have time," Murva continued, "walk on with me and I will tell you, if you like to hear. I have all the afternoon to spend in walking. It was what I came out for."

Haddie hesitated a moment, as if undecided what to do, then walked quietly at Murva's side, while she led the way toward the open country.

"Shall I begin at the time when you went away?" she asked gently.

Haddie nodded, and carefully, tenderly, so as to say no word which should unnecessarily wound, Murva went on with the history of John Wilson's life from the

time when his niece left Millville. She told her all about the kind friends who had tended him, the care which he constantly received, his patience in suffering, and his unceasing love for "his child." She told her of his unfaltering trust in the good God, his firm conviction that all would be well with him when in the dark valley, and that his dearly-loved niece would yet find her way to him. By the time she had reached the description of his last day on earth, they were well out in the country, away from the streets and chance passers-by.

"Let us sit down and rest for a while, Haddie," said Murva, pointing to the trunk of a fallen tree which lay by the roadside.

Haddie complied, and Murva went on to tell her of her last conversation with her uncle and his sudden death as witnessed by Mrs. Wood.

"His last thought was for you, Haddie, his last wish was for all possible good for you. And the last words he said to me were a request that if ever you needed it, and it were in my power, I should befriend you; and this I gladly promised. That promise you may rely on now and in the future."

Haddie sat silently beside her, her head bowed on her breast, her arms tightly folded, her whole attitude suggestive of holding herself firmly together, so that she should not show weakness. But Murva knew without seeing her face that she was touched, and waited silently for her to speak.

"I am glad," she said, finally, raising her head, but keeping her arms in the same position, "that he was well taken care of. He was better off than he would have been if I had stayed. He's better off than I am now."

She looked straight before her into the distance as she went on—" He's out of it all now, at any rate. I wish I knew what he's found out. But what's the use of thinking of that!" and she moved impatiently. "This world is what we're in, and we've got to make the best of it."

" But we can all help each other while we are in it," said Murva gently. She felt like reaching out her hand and taking hold of one of Haddie's, but the folded arms prevented her. " Is there any opportunity for me to keep the promise I made your uncle, Haddie?"

The other turned her head and looked Murva squarely in the face as she had when she first met her.

" Look at me!" she said, " look at me well. Now speak out honestly and tell me what you see. You won't hurt my feelings."

Murva did look at her well, but she could not speak what the hard face, hard under a certain kind of beauty, or what many would have called beauty, revealed to her. It was something which made her feel cold and sick, and yet she could not turn away from her.

" Why don't you say," Haddie went on, " that I must be leading an immoral life? For that is what you good Christian people call it. And why do you not begin to preach to me—or get up and go away?"

" I do not wish to go away, and I do not know how to preach, even if I had the inclination," replied Murva.

" Well, you are different from most women then, and I've got little use for them," said Haddie. " I don't want any of their preaching nor any of their pity. Some of them need that a great deal more than I do, if they did but know it."

She smiled disdainfully, as if at some mental picture, and held herself even more rigidly erect, as she said, with her head thrown back,

"I wouldn't change places with them if I could."

"Oh, Haddie!" exclaimed Murva; "you do not mean to tell me that you are satisfied with such a life!" And she leaned forward to search her face more closely.

"I did not say that," replied Haddie, "but I am nearer satisfied than I used to be since I have learned more of the world. What is the difference between me and ever so many women who call themselves respectable?" she demanded, turning almost fiercely to Murva. "I've lived long enough to know that there is but precious little, really, though they would not let their clothes touch mine if they passed me. There is one difference at least that's in my favour, not theirs. I cover nothing up, they do."

Murva looked at her with a dawning horror in her eyes at what Haddie's words suggested.

"You needn't look astonished," she went on. "I know what I am talking about. If the cover were taken off society—the dear society"—and she laughed again—that laugh which was more dreadful to Murva's ears than a groan—"some of these women who are too pure to walk on the same side of the street with such as I would be found to bear the same brand. But their position hides it, so that it is not seen. It is a great thing, position. It is all that makes the difference between us; all that keeps one in and the other out of society,"—again that indescribable emphasis—"for that takes no note of what you really are. It demands only that you shall seem."

There was a truth in Haddie's last words which

struck Murva, and found an answering echo within her. She could not believe the rest; her experience had never shown her anything of the kind. She wanted to find some way of getting hold of Haddie. Now every door seemed to be closed.

"Will you tell me something of your experience when you first left home?" she asked. "You must have found it hard to make your way alone."

"Hard! Humph!" ejaculated Haddie, with a shrug of her shoulders. "I have been to bed hungry, nearly starving, more than once, and what did I get for it? Nothing but to be told that I was a fool; and by-and-bye I thought so too; so when I had found it out, there was one fool less in the world. I tried at first to make an honest living, or what is called such, for opinions may differ as to what that is, but I tried to get work and earn enough by the doing it to support myself. Sometimes I had it, and sometimes I didn't; and when I found there was an easier way than drudging one half of the time and starving the other half, I took it; and that's all."

"But, Haddie, do you never think of the future? What are you going to do by-and-bye when your good looks are gone and you are old?"

"Do I never think of that?" and she threw her head back and laughed loudly. "Well, you can just depend I do! I haven't knocked about the world nearly ten years for nothing. It's look out for number one, I can tell you, for no one will do it for you. I am providing for my future now, for I know enough to take care of the money I make. That's all that's necessary—money. If ever I get enough of it I can even be respectable. And I know how to get it too. There are ever so many of your *virtuous* people who can better afford to pay

roundly for a still tongue than to keep their purse-strings too tight."

As Murva continued to look into the bold defiant face and realise gradually more of the meaning its owner's words conveyed, she felt that there was no opportunity here for her to show her good-will to a fellow-woman who had mistaken her way, because there was—so far as she could yet see—no sense of need. How can one hold out a helping hand when there is no conscious need of help? There seemed nothing soft and feminine about Haddie, and yet Murva could not feel it right to let the opportunity pass without further effort. As she sat silent, trying to think of another way to approach Haddie, she felt that young woman's searching gaze, and looked up to hear her say,

"I'll give you credit for honestly wishing to help me, instead of wanting to display your own superior virtue by telling me how wicked I am and showing me how far down you have to stoop in your efforts to lift me up. That's what most women who 'seek to reclaim the fallen,' as they call it, do; and the ones they work for could tell them things about their own relations and friends which would set them at work to redeem the fallen a little nearer home. If the work was done there, they wouldn't have to stoop so far down as we are. What's the matter with you?" she concluded abruptly.

"Matter with me," replied Murva, astonished at the question.

"Yes, with you," insisted Haddie. "You're in trouble of some sort! Your face shows it plain enough. But it's none of my business, I suppose."

Murva reflected for a moment. Haddie must have a softer and more susceptible side to her nature, or she

would not have noticed the traces of suffering her own face bore, in spite of all her efforts to prevent it. And the girl was, to some extent, capable of feeling for some one beside herself.

"Yes, Haddie, I am in trouble," she said gently, and her face grew wistful as she spoke, while her eyes began to look far away. "My heart aches with a never-ceasing pain, but I know that sometime, here or there, all will be well, and I am waiting."

Her thoughts flew to that loved one who had forsaken her because she would lead him higher, but again came the impelling which was always hers when they were fixed on him, "Stand fast!" Her heart and soul cried out of their great longing, "Oh, my beloved! Come!" and she had nearly forgotten her surroundings, when she felt her hand touched and the voice beside her say hesitatingly, "I am sorry."

As she looked up, Haddie withdrew her hand, and her face showed a struggle between a feeling of sympathy and doubt as to how it might be received if manifested. The suddenness of it all undermined Murva's hardly-maintained self-control, and throwing her arms around Haddie she bowed her head on the other's shoulder and burst into tears. In marked contrast to her former defiant manner Haddie patted the arm in front of her, saying soothingly,

"Don't cry! There's no one in the world that's worth it."

Murva recovered herself after a moment. "There is no one in the world who never has a heartache, Haddie."

"Hm! Mebbe," returned Haddie, the old expression beginning to show in her face, "but money and

position go a long way toward a cure with most of the women."

And she stooped and began to pluck the wild flowers and grasses which grew around their resting-place, dragging them up by the roots if they did not yield to the first bending.

"Haddie," said Murva, more decidedly than she had yet spoken, "you cannot know what you are talking about. Money and position are neither the covers for misdeeds nor the securities against sorrow that you seem to imagine them to be. You are speaking from prejudice and——"

"I am, am I?" broke in Haddie. "Well! I can tell you what you are speaking from, and that's ignorance. I've had experience, and you haven't, and consequently I've little faith in the surface appearance of things. It's because of what I know that I laugh in the faces of these so very good people. But you are not like them. You have not condescended to me at all, and—and I am sorry for your trouble. I'd help you if I could." And she looked at Murva with a different expression from her former one.

"I am sure you would, Haddie, and I thank you heartily for your sympathy," replied Murva warmly, as she thought that here perhaps was the opening she was looking for. But how should she use it? "Yet my trouble," she went on, "is one that no one can help me in, though there be ever so good a will. Because of its nature it must right itself; there is no other way. But it would give me so much satisfaction, would do me so much good if I could help you. Haddie"—and again she put an arm tenderly across the other's shoulders—"you need not continue in your present circumstances, as I must; you can break out of them and

start anew. With all my heart I will do what I can to afford you the opportunity, if you will let me. May I?"

While Murva had been speaking Haddie had been twisting the long stems of the flowers and grasses she had plucked till they formed a rope which she had, in turn, twisted around her slender wrist. She pulled at it nervously, but the strands had become entangled, and it did not yield. The harder she pulled, the tighter it grew. She stopped suddenly and looked at Murva significantly.

"Do you see?" she said, as she held out her arm.

"What, Haddie? Does it hurt you?"

"It hurts worse if I pull it than if I let it alone, and all my effort but tightens the bond. Don't you see that it is just like what I am? What's the use of trying? Better let it alone."

Murva took the wrist in one hand and deftly separated the clinging strands till they were loose enough to be unwound, then drew them gently from it.

"See!" she said. "It only requires the will and the patience. Oh, Haddie! it can be done!"

The other continued to gaze at the wrist lying in Murva's hand, while Murva looked at her so lovingly and helpfully.

"And if so, what then?" she said bitterly. "Do you not see the rest? The stain is there. It's no use! No use!" And with her other hand she struck passionately at a great green stain which the grass had left.

For a moment Murva was silent. The stain was there; but could any mistake of a weak human creature be so fatal and lasting that it could not be atoned for? Were all the other errors possible to an unde-

veloped humanity to be overcome and grown away from and this one alone to endure beyond all redemption? This was not justice, and that would have its way.

"You see yourself that it's no use, don't you?" continued Haddie. "What if I wanted to give up this life and try for another? Even though you would do what you could to help me, it would be a struggle for nothing, for the way isn't open. Even those good Christian women who are so anxious to reclaim the fallen would not let me forget, for one moment, what I was. They will pay their money to maintain what they call a home for such, and then publish it far and wide, if they do not put a sign on the house to tell everybody what it is. No! the woman who is once in that position is always in it, no matter what she does, for those who will not forget the 'has been'; and it is the women who have the best memory for this. I tell you"—and she struck her clenched hand violently on the tree-trunk—"it's women themselves who make it impossible for us to be other than we are; who stand solidly in our way, with their hands raised against us if we show any disposition to step in among them! And what are they themselves, many of them?" she went on with her old defiance of manner. "They are married, and we are not. They are earning their living, and so are we. They live with men for the sake of a home, for fine clothes and a position, and often with men they hate. They exchange what they are for what they want. What more do we? But their way is the respectable one, and ours is not, though I can't see any difference myself. And these women who sell their bodies just as much as I do mine call me a 'fallen woman.' Ha! ha! ha!"

Her scornful laugh chilled Murva's very soul, while the sting of truth in what she said kept her silent.

"Then there are other women," Haddie went on, "who are worse off than I am, except that they do not bear the brand I do. They are bound hand and foot to the men they live with, perfect slaves to their every desire, without the right of refusal of the least of these, and because they are married to them. I am myself and can say, No, when I please. I do not have to submit to anyone unless it suits me. I've got freedom and they've got respectability. I wouldn't change with them to stand what they have to."

Freedom! Was this freedom? Murva thought to herself. Oh, no, no! All her life she had desired that, but this was of no kin to what she had sought for.

"Listen, Haddie!" she said, in a firm decided tone; "while there is some justice in what you say, license is not freedom, and any attempt to make it so will surely end in self-destruction. Better the most uncongenial marriage, with all the painful experience it entails, than your position or your view; for the woman so placed, if she uses her opportunities, can at least develop a strong character, and be an example and influence for good in the world, even though she seem to accomplish but little in her immediate surroundings. There is but one way to be really free, Haddie, and that is to hold fast to the right and do our duty in maintaining it, no matter what it costs us. Self-sacrifice, instead of self-indulgence, alone leads to true freedom. And now once more I ask you, will you step out of your old path into a new one? It will cost you much, that I know, for I recognise, as you do, the unwillingness of women to forget the stain upon another when once it is publicly known to be there. The way cannot be

made easy, only possible. That it is possible, I believe, for I believe that a woman, whatever she may have been, can compel respectful recognition when she proves herself worthy of it. You must see that principle demands this of you, and, fixing your eye only upon the outcome you seek, work steadily forward to that, no matter what it brings upon you. If you will do this, you may prove yourself the stronger, the better, the grander woman because of the very mistake which costs you so dear. So you will conquer it by making it the means of a progress and a victory that otherwise you would not have had. Haddie, you do not yet know your own indwelling power. Most women do not, and yet it lies within us all, waiting to be called into action. It is a power which would lift us from the old level where so much wrong and injustice prevail, and place us on thrones; put us where we should rule over the higher instead of the baser nature of men. Will you make this effort?"

Haddie had gradually lost her defiant attitude and expression as Murva went on, and now her head was drooped low as she paused and waited for an answer. Suddenly she threw up her arms, raised her face, and looking up to the smiling sky above her, cried, "Oh! I wish I could, but I can't. It's no use."

Murva saw there were tears in her eyes, and, leaning forward, kissed her cheek, saying tenderly, "I'll help you, Haddie. I will go to New York and make a quiet little home somewhere, and you can come and live with me till we can see what is next best to do."

"Oh, you are good! you are good!" cried Haddie. "but I can't. I haven't got the strength to stand up against it all. Besides, that would hurt you; didn't you know it?"

"Nothing nor no one can hurt me but myself," answered Murva, quietly.

"I wish I could," continued Haddie, "but I *know* it's no use. I've seen too much. You might as well let me go my own way. But I'll tell you what you could do," she said, with a change in tone, as if struck by a sudden thought. "There are ever so many girls who, if they could have help just at the right time, would not get so far as I am. They are the ones that need it most, and every little while I come across them. I'll send them to you, if you'll help them. You'll find you can accomplish more by preventing than by trying to cure."

Was this the answer to her question—what should she do with herself while waiting? Was here a work ready and waiting for her? "Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do with thy might." Was it not possible that she could be of more use here than in any other one way? Might not her own experience have made her quick to feel and firm to guide?

She reviewed the situation rapidly, and made up her mind quickly.

"I will go to New York shortly," she replied, "and I shall depend upon you to do what you have said; to put me in the way of being of use." She felt that it was better not to urge Haddie further now on her own account. "You promise me this?"

"Yes, I promise you that," replied Haddie, "for I can do that. It would be of no use to promise more." And she rose to her feet.

Murva rose also saying, "Where shall I find you then?"

"I'll find you then," said Haddie, after a moment's thought. "When you are ready, send me word through

the post-office. And now I must go, for I want to get back to-night. You won't be sick of your bargain, and want to take it all back, will you?" looking keenly into Murva's face.

"No, Haddie," she answered, gently, "I think that is the best use I can make of myself at present. I want to forget myself in helping others. I am not needed here. I will not walk back with you, for I want to remain a little while longer and think it all out. So good-bye," and she held out her hand. "You shall hear from me soon."

Haddie took it for a moment, half relinquished it, then raised it suddenly and laid her cheek for an instant against it, dropping it as suddenly, and walking away quickly before Murva could say a word.

She sat down again and watched her old school friend till she was swallowed up in the distance. How strangely she had met her after all these years! How strangely things happened! Happened? No. All was law, not chance. The time when she could serve Haddie Wilson, and when Haddie could serve her, was the time when they had met. "And in the fullness of the time it came to pass." So it would ever be. When the fullness of the time was come she would have her beloved again.

The sun was setting in the west, and the chirp and stir of insect-life which precedes nightfall was all about her. She had mused for some time, and was warned that she must bestir herself lest her friends should be anxious about her. She followed on in Haddie's footsteps, comforted, strengthened, ready to bear her part in the world's work.

CHAPTER XXIX.

DR. CRAWFORD held a letter high over his wife's head tantalizingly, as he laughingly exhorted her not to be in such a hurry to read it.

"When one of Murva's letters arrives you are like a child with a big stick of candy," he said. "You must be disciplined."

"Now, Donald," exclaimed Kate, "you know you are just as glad to hear how she is getting on, as I am. Such a grand good work as she is doing! No one but she would have thought of it. And she forgets her own trouble in that of other people. Give me my letter! Do!"

"Pay for it then! Cash on delivery!" and he held it toward her, keeping it fast by one corner till she raised her lips to his and kissed him.

Kate was so fragile now that Donald's heart ached when he looked at her. He never allowed his feelings to appear, however, and was always cheerful, often gay when with her. She seemed to be gradually fading away, and he was able to do nothing to check it. He had studied her case, had conferred with the highest authorities upon it, and believed that he understood it thoroughly. According to their joint theories, the physical conditions were such that she could not be absolutely well, and yet these did not seem to account for the continually increasing weakness which she manifested, and which he knew must, before very long,

bear her out upon the ceaseless tide which sweeps all from the here to the there, if she did not soon gain strength.

He had exhausted every remedy he knew, all the ways and means at his command, and yet she constantly grew weaker. More than this, he felt that Kate herself realised what was before her, knew that she was steadily failing, though she never uttered a word which betrayed her knowledge, and was always as bright as she had strength to be. Yet he had seen that in her face when she did not know he was observing her that made his heart swell with pain, and made him long to hold her so fast in his arms that nothing could part them. Her father and mother often questioned him with their looks. It seemed as if they could not trust themselves with words, and their mute interrogations compelled him to make acknowledgments to himself he would gladly have avoided. He sat by his wife's great chair, which she seldom left now except as she was lifted from one place to another, and his heart cried out, "What shall I do? What shall I do when she is gone."

But he smiled upon her and looked over her shoulder as she read the letter.

"NEW YORK, *August*—, 18—.

"MY BLESSED KATE:—

"If I should try to do what you ask me, and give you a detailed account of my doings day by day, I hardly know where the time would come from in which to accomplish it. I am constantly busy, constantly finding plenty to do that needs the immediate doing. If I were asked what my work was, I could only say, 'A work for women.' This includes so much, and what could not be classified under any distinctive head. It

is not only one class of women who come in my way through Haddie Wilson, but all women of every kind and condition. I rarely meet one who does not express her need of help in some direction, though not audibly perhaps. I find, as I come more into sympathy with others, through seeing them as parts of one common whole, even as I am, that a subtle sense develops in me by which I know they have a need, for I feel their silent reaching out for something to help and sustain them. I feel often in the presence of others a flowing out to them like the supply to a demand which is quite involuntary on my part, but a constant pleasure to me. I am so glad, so proud, that my sister women's instincts draw them to me, so thankful that they are never repelled but benefited instead, as they tell me.

"I have come to be, and I could not tell you how, a sort of a repository for women's troubles; and I can assure you, these are plentiful, even where there seems the fairest surface. 'It is such a relief to have some one you can speak to!' I hear again and again; and all this experience but impresses upon me most forcibly the necessity of being as 'wise as a serpent, and harmless as a dove.' How speak the right word at the right time, which shall heal instead of wound, unite instead of rupture, help to clear the vision instead of blind the judgment through misplaced sympathy? It seems to me that of all the higher education to-day, that is needed the most which shall teach women to know themselves, to find within their own natures resources and powers which they can rely upon, instead of looking to others, especially to the other sex, for support and help in their weaknesses. Not till women understand themselves better will they know men better, and maintain that equality with them which is their

true position, instead of leaning upon them to be upheld. And not till this is done will women be freed from many of the miseries which are theirs now through their ignorance and the self-depreciation it brings.

"Women tell me they are drawn towards me and open their hearts to me almost without intending to do so; that they leave me comforted and strengthened. Surely 'It is more blessed to give than to receive,' and the reward of such work is the doing it. To-day it is some wife who is hiding a smarting sore, to-morrow some mother who is distressed because of her children, another time some woman who has all and more than she can do to bear her life, because of someone or ones who are connected with it; and again one who is outwardly a physical invalid because really a heart invalid. Then those young women, thick on every hand, who are dependent upon their own exertions for a livelihood and for whom encouraging words, together with financial help just at the time it is needed most, means so much, for these save many a one from going that wrong way into which deprivation more than inclination has pushed thousands. But those who come to me through Haddie would keep my heart and hands full if there were no others. These have not so grown into that life that they cannot get out of it, and what they need is the help to get out, for they have the inclination; but without it they drift on. They have to be sent away, given new surroundings. They cannot remain where they are known and accomplish anything. People will not forget, and when these girls succeed in making a new start they are found out by someone and cast off. How can they have the strength to stand against this and fight their way?

"So I do what I can toward establishing these in new

places, among new people. I do not save them from their former lives, I but give them the opportunity of saving themselves. This is all that can be done for any human being, whatever his condition. The work of the Nazarene was not the saving of men, but the showing them how to save themselves. I always have a few in my home with me, as many as I can accommodate, these going away as fast as I can provide for them to do so, and others coming in. My house might be called a sort of half-way station between weakness, pain, and crime, and strength, courage, and independence.

"There is one peculiar feature—how could it be otherwise, coming from such a peculiar person, you know—about the advice I give these girls. I do *not* advise them to improve the first opportunity they have to get married. I say nothing about it. I do my best to show them the desirability of independence and self-reliance, impressing upon them their own ability to care for and protect themselves if they will. I never hold up marriage to any woman as a refuge, but as the highest possible relation to another, which no one should dare to enter from any such motive.

"And so my work goes on, a quiet, unseen one, totally unknown, so far as any public knowledge of it goes, but far-reaching in its results, as I have reason to feel. You asked me, Kate dear, if I could really be happy; and I can truthfully answer, yes, I am happy, thankful that I can, in some small degree, minister to my fellow-men and happy in the ministration. I try to remember the example of One who 'came not to be ministered unto, but to minister,' and go on cheerfully from day to day accomplishing as much as I can in the day. I have no time for brooding, and I am glad of it; it but

cultivates selfishness. But I have all the time to wait in, and I shall wait till I die and then—in the beyond!

"One word, to you, Donald, before I close. I have found that many an invalid woman is such because of a cause which all the physician's prescriptions fail to reach. It is a hidden sorrow, and your *materia medica* contains no remedy for it. There, the physician is powerless, but the man is all potent. To cure, the cause must be removed, and often a husband may succeed where a physician fails. The healing art needs new disciples to-day, those who can prescribe for the heart and soul as well as for the body, for these are inseparable.

"And now, my dear, true friends, good-bye. Think of me as I have pictured myself to you, contented and happy, knowing what sometime shall be.

"Yours in all faithfulness,

"MURVA."

Though reading the letter together, Kate had held it a little nearer to her husband when she came to the part where Murva spoke particularly to him, in acknowledgment of the fact that it was intended more for him than for her, and of course without yet knowing what was written. They finished the reading at the same time and Kate's hands, still holding the letter, dropped wearily in her lap, while her head fell back against her chair. Donald looked at her face and, simultaneous with a sight of the tears stealing down from under her closed eyelids came a flash of suggestion.

Could it be that his wife carried a "hidden sorrow," which the physician was ignorant of and could not reach if he knew it, but which the husband might heal?

No, it could not be possible! Kate had ever been shielded in every possible way. He could truthfully say that he had kept the vow made at the time when he found she was likely to be more or less helpless as long as she lived, to be to her all that it was possible for a husband to be. What was there he had not done? What had he done that he should not have done? Taking his wife's hands tenderly in his own he said,

"Tell me, my darling! Can the husband succeed for you where the physician has failed?"

He felt something stir within Kate as for an instant she remained motionless, and then, to his astonishment, she leaned suddenly forward, threw her arms around his neck, and holding him as if she never would let him go again burst into a storm of sobs and tears.

Her slight frame was convulsed from head to foot with the violence of her emotions and, in alarm, he endeavoured to calm and soothe her, amazed at the result his words had provoked. Never had he seen her in such a state, and he feared the consequences from her enfeebled condition. Finally lifting her as if she were a child, he sat down with her in his arms in a large rocking-chair, and, like a mother with her infant, pillowed her head upon his breast, and tried to comfort and quiet her with loving words and tender caresses.

"There, there! my darling! Hush now; you will make yourself ill. Rest a little, and then tell me all about it. Not the smallest sorrow shall you hold and carry that I can take from you. There! There!" And he ceased not from his loving minstrations till, exhausted, she grew quiet in his arms, and lay with her face pressed close against his neck, and now and then a long quivering sigh, the only sound which came from her.

Donald wondered more and more within himself as he waited for her to grow calm enough to speak. He was so entirely unconscious of any cause for grief which Kate had other than her ill-health that his heart grew heavier and heavier as he thought, "She fears she is going to die soon." Finally, laying his cheek upon her own, he said tenderly, "Tell me, dear, what troubles you."

Kate's answer was but to press her face closer to him for a moment, saying finally, "Oh, Donald! How can I?"

"My darling! Am I not your other self? Surely you can open your whole heart and soul to me."

"Not if I have to speak against you," replied Kate, in an almost inaudible voice.

"Against me!" echoed Donald, and look and voice betrayed his astonishment. But these quickly changed as he went on. "I must have failed somewhere in my duty, dear; but, believe me, it has not been from intention, only from failing to see what I ought to do. I love you too well, my darling, to be remiss in the slightest thing that can add to your comfort or happiness, knowingly. Only tell me what it is, dear, that I may remedy it."

"Oh, Donald dear, you were not to blame—you could not help it! I have never blamed you. Never!" And Kate raised herself in his arms, grasping his face in her hands, and repeating as she looked into it, "Never!"

Donald grew more and more puzzled as he listened to her.

"That was staunch and true in you, my dear wife," he said gently. "But not yet do I know what you refer to."

Kate's head went down again upon his shoulder, so that her face was hidden as she replied slowly, "I mean —what you—have—done—what you couldn't help doing," she added quickly.

"But *what* have I done, dear?" insisted her husband.

"What a man should not do who has a wife," she answered almost inaudibly, then louder, "unless he was driven to it, as you were."

For a moment after her reply there was perfect silence. Donald was literally unable to instantly grasp her meaning. As one gradually broke upon him, he could not, for an instant, believe it hers. And yet what other meaning could there be in her words?

"You do not—you cannot—mean—unfaithfulness?" he asked slowly.

"Oh, Donald, I do not call it that!" exclaimed his wife. "You did not—you could not wish to be so. You are not to blame. Remember, I know that you are not."

Kate felt her arms grasped suddenly by her husband, who held her away from him so that he could look squarely into her face, while he said, in a tone she had never heard from him before, "Do you mean that you believe me guilty of acts with others which belong properly only to the marriage-relation? Answer me plainly, Yes or No."

Poor Kate's heart nearly stood still. It had been hard enough to speak at all, but now it was impossible. Her head dropped and she made no answer.

At this silent assent, he rose suddenly with her in his arms, and placed her, as gently as ever, again in her chair; then without a word he turned to leave the room. His face was stern, almost awful in its sternness. His compressed lips looked as if they would never open

again, his eyes as if they could not bear to look at her.

A great cry broke from Kate as she saw how he looked, and that he was about to leave her.

"Donald! My husband! Do not go away! Oh, come to me! Come!" and she stretched her arms toward him, leaning far out of her chair.

His hand was upon the door, but he hesitated, then turned and came slowly toward her till he stood silent and erect with folded arms beside her. For the first time in their married life he failed to respond to her proffered caresses.

Kate, with overflowing eyes and quivering lips, looked up at him piteously, saying in a broken voice, "Forgive me, dear! I am so sorry that I spoke of it at all."

"Why should you not speak of it if you believe it?" he broke out suddenly. "But how dare you believe it? What cause have I ever given you for it? How——"

He checked himself suddenly as he thought of the probable consequence of all this excitement to his wife. He must still save her all that was possible. He struggled with himself for a moment, for his naturally deep, strong nature was thoroughly roused and could not be easily quieted. Then he drew a chair to his wife's side, and sat down, saying, "Since this subject has been opened between us, Kate, let us have a thorough explanation and understanding. It is due to yourself no less than to me. I am so astounded that you can believe such a thing of me that I have spoken to you in a manner I regret. Tell me, what cause you have for your belief? And who is the woman you suspect equally with myself?"

"I do not know, and I do not care," Kate answered wearily.

"You do not care!" he repeated looking at her curiously. "That's strange! I should suppose—but tell me the rest. What made you believe this?"

There had dawned upon Kate gradually, as she noted his indignation, the possibility that what she believed was not true; very gradually, for her conviction was so assured in consequence of her realisation of her own shortcomings, so strong through her silent brooding over it, that it could not be unsettled all at once. This had been developing with her almost unconsciously, till suddenly the clear possibility that she was mistaken broke upon her and with a strength born of it she sat up, grasped her husband's hands in her own, notwithstanding their reluctance to meet hers, and said in a voice which showed her new-born hope, "Donald, do you mean that what I have believed is not true?"

"Of course it is not true!" burst from her husband, as he drew his hands from hers and impulsively moved his chair away from her. "To think that I should have to tell you this—that you do not know it of yourself."

Kate threw herself from her chair upon the floor at his feet. "Oh, my husband! Forgive me!" she murmured brokenly and lay, a still heap before him.

Donald quickly stooped over her to raise her up, and saw that she had fainted. His indignation ebbed, and the love which had been within him all the while flowed into its place and put it out utterly. He lifted her, and laying her upon a couch in the room, busied himself in restoring her to consciousness. Before long she opened her eyes to find her husband bending over her, to feel his lips upon her own, to hear him saying, "Be quiet now and rest, my darling."

She was too exhausted to do otherwise than obey,

and with her hand in his she soon fell asleep. Donald watched her as she lay so white and frail, and wondered to himself, could this be the cause of that increasing weakness which the physician had been powerless to check? It must be so, and truly the husband was the only one who could help her. What she must have suffered hiding this torturing suspicion within herself. Suspicion? It had been more than that. She had shown a positive conviction. How had she come by it? How had it been possible for her to believe thus of her husband?

He could recall no word or act in all their married life which could give her the least foundation for such a belief. He could find no solution of the puzzle; the more he thought of it the more unsolvable it grew. But his heart ached for her sufferings, so carefully concealed all this while, and he shuddered as he thought that Kate would have gone to her death, carrying this secret with her, had not he chanced to open the way for its revelation because of the idea suggested by Murva's letter. Could she have known of Kate's hidden sorrow and purposely said what she did? If so he blessed her from the bottom of his heart. Now, there was time to undo: then it would have been too late.

He sat quietly by her for over an hour; then she awoke and lay looking at him, with a new expression on her face, a light in her eyes which he had not seen there for a long time.

"My darling!" he said tenderly, stooping over her, "we will not talk much now, only enough for you to tell me how you came to believe this. Will you?"

"Why, Donald, you said yourself that men *must* have what the marriage-relation affords; that their needs

made it necessary. How could I help but believe what I did, remembering how I have been?"

His question was answered. The physician had convicted the husband, and his wife had but accepted the authoritative evidence.

Logic is an excellent thing in its way, but its faithful application is sometimes productive of mischief.

Dr. Donald Crawford gained more valuable knowledge in the next ten minutes through the opportunity offered him for the study of mental anatomy than he had ever gained in a far longer time from the study of its physical prototype. His improvement of the opportunity was shown by his resolution to henceforth keep the physician and the husband apart as conducive to the best interests of both.

All his perplexity and wonderment vanished as he saw how natural Kate's conclusion was, and his own heart ached as he reflected that it was his own hand which had given his wife this sore wound.

"My precious wife!" he said kneeling beside her, "what you have heard me say, as a physician, is, in a certain way, true; but I did not dream that you would apply it to ourselves. There are other things which are true also, and one of them is that a great and absorbing love, a pure, unselfish love, can lift a man above that necessity, because it will lead him to act for the one he loves instead of for himself. The man who loves a woman well enough can and will rule himself for her sake. He could no more give to another any part of what belongs to her than he could wilfully hurt and injure her. Physical necessities are strong, dear, but the love which is not allied with them is stronger, and it will draw a man up in spite of their power to draw him down. The man who would be unfaithful to

his wife, pleading his necessities as the excuse therefor, does not yet know what the highest, best and strongest love is. Frankly, dear, I have not seen this myself as clearly as I do now since your revelation has held so much before my eyes. Remember that now and for ever I am your husband, loving you only and with all my strength. I can have no enjoyment or happiness in which you do not bear a part. Years ago I consecrated my life to you, and now I consecrate it anew."

And bending over her he laid his lips lovingly upon hers, while her arms held him in that embrace born of the joy and new-found hope which nothing again could take from her.

CHAPTER XXX.

HAROLD DEERING had proven himself—as he believed —master of the situation, but he was not happy, was not even content. He had taken the way to bring his wife to her senses, and it had brought her to them so effectually as to put her farther from him than ever. But he had maintained his authority as a husband, his right as a man, and such satisfaction as could be derived from this fact he had.

He continued to live in his old home—Home? No, house!—but his loneliness was often unbearable, and the silent witnesses of his former companion all around him seemed to reproach him with their very silence. Neither at home nor abroad could he for a moment forget his wife. Do what he would, she was ever before him. Immediately following her departure he had recklessly acted according to his inclination, following wherever that led him, till the reaction from excess drove him from it. He could find no satisfaction there, experienced nothing but anger and disgust with himself. Unconsciously Murva's high ideal barred every way for him, turn where he would. He was bent upon carrying out his own desires in his own way, and it as resolutely checked him.

More than this, he was haunted; haunted by a dream; the one he had had when he went away from

her before she was his wife. So often as to be almost a regular occurrence, he was climbing that same mountain, stumbling, and bruising himself against what lay in his way, yet ever hearing above him her "Come!" seeing all the while her eyes, with their streaming light, which illumined all the way down to where he was stumbling and showed him how and where to get higher. This had occurred so frequently that even when awake he seemed to be drawn toward her in spite of himself, seemed to hear constantly, like a far-off echo in his ears, "Come up higher!"

While he was at his place of business daily and went through the form of attending to it regularly, his heart was not in it, and he was indifferent to whether he made or lost money. For the first few days after Murva's departure from his house, he had confidently expected that she would return; but when she did not he had set himself resolutely to forget her. Why should he not forget the woman who had repudiated him? But he found that he could not, and he did not yet know why. Did not know that because her strong pure nature had touched and was working in the depths of his, he could never again be entirely separated from her, however wide apart they might be in person. In so far as they were mated, they were united for beyond time.

But his unrest grew upon him. Do what he would, he could not forget long enough to really enjoy himself. He knew that she was in the city, for Dr. Crawford had given him the information when he requested it; knew that she was carrying out "one of her Quixotic schemes," without clearly understanding what she was doing.

On this evening in the early fall he sat alone before the light open fire, a great hunger gnawing at his heart.

All day he had been consumed with the desire to hear from her. His hot anger had cooled somewhat, but his pride was as strong as ever. He could do nothing, would do nothing to bring that result for himself; and yet as he sat there he looked down the long vista of years to come, and wondered how he should ever get through them. What would life be without her? Before he knew her, he could look with equanimity and even preference upon a single life, but now, because of the had been, that was no more possible. Should he free himself from her and marry again? It would serve her right if he did, and yet he knew—way down in the bottom of his heart he knew—that he would not so be free from her.

He knew that for the rest of his life she would be with him in a silent, unseen way, would stand between him and any other one with whom he might ally himself, knew that her face would always look into his own, and silently demand of him his freely-pledged loyalty to herself. No! He could not do that! Much as his pride would like to wound her, he knew that yielding to it in this way would but wound him most in the end.

He could endure it no longer, and starting up from his chair he went into the hall and put on his coat and hat. Then he hesitated a moment, but finally opened the door and passed out. He walked aimlessly, as if he had no distinct place or object in view. There was a marked change from the vigorous, bright-faced cheery-voiced, alert man of a few months before. Something was gone from him. Was it his soul? Anyone meeting him would have seen that he was wandering without a purpose, scarcely conscious of where he was or what he was doing. He was looking at the within in-

stead of the without, and all places which his feet touched were alike to him.

Suddenly he was roused from his abstraction by a laugh close at hand, a merry girlish laugh. He looked up and found that he was near by a saloon and restaurant on one of those streets devoted to resorts which gave no outward sign of their true character save to the initiated. Near the entrance stood a man and a young girl. He bore the appearance of being well-to-do, had the general air which a superficial observer would have said belonged to a gentleman. But one accustomed to study physiognomy would have seen a sensual, selfish nature stamped upon his face, and would have wished to whisper "Beware" into the ear of his companion, who was decidedly pretty, but whose dress and manner indicated that she was one of that numerous class in all large cities, a working girl, who received too insufficient a sum from her labour to enable her to wear the aspect of plenty. Meagreness spoke from every part of her attire, but her face was lighted up, and she was evidently enjoying the society of her companion.

Harold Deering rapidly took in the situation as he saw them standing before the door. The man was evidently urging his companion to enter, and she was hesitating, though with some merry remark which had accompanied her laughter. He was bent upon inducing the girl to go with him, as Harold could see, and he almost started forward to check her, restraining himself as he thought that it was really none of his business, and he had no right to interfere.

He stepped to one side to watch the outcome, and as he did so a woman passed him swiftly, going directly to the couple and laying her hand on the girl's arm,

saying, as she did so, "I have been looking for you. Come with me, do!"

They both turned toward her and the girl answered, "Oh! is it you? To-morrow I will go with you, but I have an engagement now."

"Go with me now," persisted the woman. "If your engagement is with this man, it is one you ought not to keep. Come!" and she drew her gently away from him; "I know what I am talking about, and you don't."

The man started forward with an oath, and grasped the girl's other arm, saying "Who are you that comes meddling with what does not concern you? Is she any relation of yours?" turning to the girl, who shook her head. "Do not listen to her then, Kitty," he went on. "You promised me this evening, you know."

The girl looked from one to the other, saying, as the woman did not release her hold upon her, "Yes, I did promise him. Won't to-morrow do just as well?"

"No!" answered the woman, almost fiercely. "To-morrow it will be too late! You must come now."

The man reached out and struck at the hand with which she was holding the girl, saying, "Let her alone, will you? She is going with me to-night. To-morrow you can have her, if you want her."

Without letting go of the girl the woman took a step nearer the man, and said, in a loud, determined voice, "Do you think I do not know that, if this girl goes in there with you to-night, to-morrow will find her ruined? And that this is what you are taking her there for?"

The man stepped back a little, and turning to the girl again she continued: "Listen well to what I say. This man will ruin you if he gets the opportunity. It is all he is seeking you for, and if you persist in remaining with

him, before you realise what has happened to you, you will find that you have entered upon that life which, once begun, you can't get out of. Don't believe a word he says. His promises of a better position for you where you can earn higher wages and through his influence, is a lie. I know this is what he has told you, for I know his kind. He and his like have ruined more girls this way than the great ocean could ever wash clean. To-night you have the chance to save yourself; to-morrow it will be too late. I know this place he is trying to get you to go into, and I know what has happened in it often enough. It is easy enough to go in, but you would not find it so easy to come out of. Now do come with me." And she tried to draw the girl away, while the latter looked from one to the other bewildered.

Through the woman's efforts they had come a step or two nearer the light which was streaming from a window near by, and her face was fully visible. As the man saw it he burst into a loud laugh, and stepping again to the girl's side he said, pointing to the woman, "This is a pretty specimen to come interfering between you and me. Why, she is a prostitute herself!"

"And if I am," said the woman, turning toward him defiantly, "I don't mean that this girl shall be one if I can help it."

"Well!" returned the man, giving her a brutal push, "you can't help anything. Let her alone now, or I will give you over to the police," and as he spoke a policeman turned the corner below and walked toward them.

The girl stood, as if too frightened to move either way, and the woman said to her gently, "Don't be afraid. Only come with me and I will take you to someone who will care for you for a few days, and do you so

much good." And with her hand again on the girl's arm she began to draw her as gently away.

By this time the policeman was close upon them, and the man, furious at being balked in this manner, stepped forward, saying, "Here, policeman! This is a prostitute"—pointing to the woman—"who has been soliciting me on the street; and after I sent her about her business I found her inducing this young girl to go with her. To protect the girl you had better run the woman in."

The big policeman turned toward the woman. "Drop that now!" he said threateningly, as he saw that she held the girl's arm, and that the girl seemed frightened.

But the woman stood her ground, and with no appearance of discomposure replied before the policeman could say more, "What that man just said is not true. I am trying to persuade this girl not to enter that place with him. You know what kind of a one it is, and whether she ought to go there or not."

Harold Deering saw the man step nearer and touch the hand of the policeman, who then immediately grasped the woman by the arm and said roughly, "Let that girrul alone anyways, thin. You do be restrainin' her of her liberties. Shet up!" he added, as he saw she was about to speak. "Shet that head o' yer's, or I'll run yer in fer shure. You won't? Thin come along wid me!"

And wrenching her hand from the girl's arm he began to drag her away.

Harold stepped out of the dark doorway from which he had watched the whole proceeding, saying, "Policeman! a word with you, if you please. Here is my name and address," handing him his business card. "Just wait a moment, will you, while I tell you about this affair, for I have seen and heard it all?"

The policeman read the card, and his manner became respectful immediately. The firm was one of the best known in the city.

"To be shure sir, to be shure."

"This man was urging this girl to go into that place with him when this woman came along. She did not solicit him, but endeavoured to prevent the girl from entering, warned her against the man, and tried to induce her to go with her. I know none of them, but I know, as you do, that this place is one which no young girl who cares for her reputation can afford to enter, especially at night. That fact is certain. What this woman is and where she would take her to is another matter, and I know nothing about it. As we are sure of one fact and uncertain about the other, suppose you go with them to where the woman proposes to take the girl, and see if she tells the truth before you arrest her, for she certainly tells it here. I will follow also."

"I want only," spoke up the woman, "to put her where she will be away from that man's influence, and out of temptation for a little while. Where she will be taken care of and given all the help she needs. It is not so very far from here, and"—turning to Harold Deering—"if you will go you will find that I have spoken the truth."

The policeman had released his hold upon her after hearing Harold's statement, and now stood as if undecided what to do. The man began to whisper in his ear, to the policeman's evident uneasiness.

"Will you go to the station thin, and make yer charge against her?" he said in answer.

"I do not think any charges had better be made," spoke up Harold decidedly. "I saw him bribe—excuse me—*attempt* to bribe you, and can testify to it."

The policeman hurriedly shook himself free from the man, and turning to the woman said, "Come on, thin! I'll go wid you, and see that the girrul is safe."

All the while the girl had been looking from one to the other, shrinking from all of them against the building behind her. The woman put her arm through hers kindly, saying, "Come now, Kitty. Don't be afraid. You will see that I've taken care of you for your own good."

The girl turned with her as she led the way, and they moved up the street, the policeman following after them. Harold halted a moment to watch the man, who started blusteringly toward him, but evidently thought better of it, for he turned and went into the place which he been urging the girl to enter. Having seen the last of him, Harold followed after the others, at a little distance from them.

They had walked, as it seemed to him, for about fifteen minutes, and were in a quiet, respectable street, occupied mainly by the intelligent class of working people, when the woman stopped before one of the houses, a modest-appearing one, with an air of cheerfulness about it as the light shone from its windows.

"This is the place," she said, turning toward the policeman. "You know nothing against this, do you?"

He replied "No; go on!" as Harold came up to them.

The woman went up the steps and rang the bell. Harold noticed that a swinging lamp hung above them, and that a street lamp stood immediately before the house, the two throwing an unusual amount of light upon the entrance. He stepped to one side, where he could see without being seen, just as the door opened. A woman stood framed in the doorway, the light from

above falling full upon her face. What it revealed was the answer to every question, the refutation of every doubt. Pure, sweet, dignified, a very woman, and sure of herself. She held out both hands, the one to the woman, the other to the girl, as the first said simply, "I have brought her to you."

"Yes, Haddie," she replied, and drawing the girl towards her she said, "You will remain with me for a little while, will you not?"

As she saw her face and heard her voice, the voice of a pure and strong woman soul, the girl burst into tears, and sank down in the doorway: but the beautiful one tenderly raised her and stood with her arm around her, saying to the woman who had brought her, "I will take care of her, Haddie. Are you not coming in?"

"Not now," the other replied. "I will see you again soon. Good-night." And reaching out she closed the door upon them as they stood there and went down the steps.

She went directly to the policeman, and said quietly, "Do you want me?"

"No, no!" he rejoined. "It's all right. She's a leddy, that one." Then turning to where Harold stood in the shadow, he said, "It's all right, sir; good-night to you," and took himself off.

Haddie stood silent a moment, as if waiting for him to speak. But he did not, and going a little nearer to him she said, "I am much obliged to you, sir, for your help this evening."

He did not seem to hear her, but stood as silent and motionless as a statue.

"Good-evening, sir," Haddie continued, and began to move away.

He started, and "What do you know of the lady who lives there?" he asked abruptly.

"I know that she is one of the few women who don't preach, but work," answered Haddie as abruptly, and walked quickly away.

All day he had longed, unacknowledged to himself, to hear from his wife, and now he had seen her face and heard her voice. A new feeling was stirring within him. If he had named it, he would have called it reverence.

He looked up at the house, turned away, hesitated and looked back again, turned for the second time, and with his head dropped upon his breast went away.

The early morning hours saw Harold Deering's bed still unused, saw him on his knees with his face buried in one of his wife's dresses, saw his strong frame shaken with emotion, witnessed one of those unseen battles which bring forth a resurrection from the dead—one in which the help to victory is the inner voice saying, "He that ruleth his own spirit is greater than he that taketh a city."

CHAPTER XXXI.

CHRISTMAS-TIME again. Only a year since Murva had given utterance to her first protest, feeling almost guilty as she did so, and yet impelled thereto by a power which she could not resist.

How much that year had contained! How many years she had lived in it! Years which were like so many stitches dropped in knitting, which one has to go back to and pick up. With all the pain which had been crowded into this one year it had also held much happiness. While it had been of the kind which she had foreseen for herself all those years ago when she had gone to the rock for its silent support and had found the cross upon it—when she had, through the welling up within her of her deep and strong nature, bowed before that cross, ready to follow where it led her, it was the one of all others which she could look to as affording her the highest revelations and the greatest opportunities.

She could say truthfully, "It is good that I have been afflicted; it is good that I have lived." Her own struggles to live up to her highest conviction, her own pain in that consistency, had but enabled her the better to feel herself but one of the many members of one body which should do its utmost for the others, that the one body might be lifted higher; had but enabled her to know their feelings through her own; had but

established with them the kinship of suffering, than which is none more holy. She could truthfully say that she had been of some use even in the short time since she had found her work. None but herself knew how many wounded hearts she had helped to soothe, how many families had been saved from shipwreck, how many young women had been helped to help themselves, how many men—did they but know it—had had preserved to them what had been in jeopardy, and through her efforts for women, her unfailing sympathy and help for everyone who came in her way.

Pain's true nature is unrecognised, because it is hard to bear. But it is a white-winged divine messenger who looks dark only because seen in the shadow of the senses. To pass around to its other side through spiritual perception is to see the heavenly light shining upon it, that light which it brings with it, every feature radiant with eternal peace, its outstretched hands full of blessings which only seem afflictions when falling below the line of light.

The lesson of pain is the grandest lesson mortals can learn, for it leads them to "Not mine, but thine." It opens the way for the divine consciousness to descend into the human and so divinise humanity.

Murva was going to Millville for two or three days with her tried friends. And she was going with a feeling of thankfulness in her heart for Kate, for she was getting well. The husband had proved his capabilities as far beyond the physician's, and the weakness which threatened shortly to end Kate's life was slowly and surely disappearing.

With other women than Kate, Murva had seen the invigorating and renewing effects of joy and happiness, the spontaneous working of the will released from the

paralysing effects of fear and sorrow: and it seemed to her that a new office waited in the world for those able to fill it, that of soul physician, the true minister of God.

She could not remain longer than a very few days; too much was required of her through the ever-waiting demand upon her. But for old friendship's sake she was going to have these few and for another reason as well. She had a strong desire to again visit the old rock—a silly sentimental feeling, natures which pride themselves upon their strength would say. But this lonely watcher of change all about it, itself unchanged, appealed to her and drew her toward it.

Eight years before she had turned from its silent lesson to what was offered her instead, and this had but brought her to the very position which that had then declared. Eight years before she had seen the woman, toiling along the dry and lonely road with the cross galling her shoulder, freed from that burden only through her own holding of herself erect in obedience to the voice of the spirit. Now she felt she had heard that voice, had done what in her lay in obedience to it, and the mark of bondage was no more upon her.

Her journey was soon at an end, and delightedly she held her friend again in her arms.

"Why, Kate dear, how well you look?" was her first exclamation.

"That is because I discharged my old physician and engaged a new one who understood my case better," Kate replied, with a mischievous glance at her husband.

Donald too had lost some years in appearance, looked younger by far than when she had seen him last. Mr. and Mrs. Melton as well, seemed rejuvenated, and the

atmosphere of the whole house was changed, had more life and action in it than for long before.

All were struck with Murva's appearance, and yet no one spoke of it except afterward to each other and then in a low tone. "She seems sacred, like one who has overcome," was Mr. Melton's verdict, in which all concurred.

Christmas day was bright and sparkling, cold with a wealth of warm sunshine which prevented it from being keen, while the snow lay only here and there in patches. Murva, without giving her reasons for it, and because these were sacred to herself, had that morning expressed her intention of driving a short distance into the country in the afternoon, and Dr. Crawford had placed one of his horses at her disposal. After a delightful and restful morning with Kate and her parents, and the holiday dinner to which Donald's presence gave an added zest, she took possession of the light carriage waiting for her and, with a laughing direction to Kate not to look for her till she saw her, went away by herself to keep this anniversary of her wedding day.

Tears welled to her eyes as she travelled over the well-known road, the protest of the yet strong and active sense-consciousness in the midst of that strength and courage which is of the divine. The past was so vivid with her, it seemed but yesterday that she was there before, then, as now, making a pilgrimage; now, as then, to be comforted and helped, she felt sure: for she had begun to see that the great world we live in is but one great object lesson, the different objects, as well as their continuity through their interdependence, but affording the means for the manifestation of a subjective nature when human nature is sufficiently developed to reach out and find it. She began to see why

she learned lessons from the visible things about her and to realise more and more the sublimity of living.

Loneliness, pain, honesty of purpose and capacity for self-sacrifice bring the higher side of human nature in touch with that deep which the visible world veils, so that it can draw from the unfailing hidden springs.

Absorbed in retrospection the time seemed short when she found herself again in the neighbourhood of her old friend. The winter's light fall of snow was like that of her previous visit, so that she had no difficulty in reaching the rock. Nothing had changed. No trees had been cut, even. All seemed as before. She passed to the farther side and, bending, looked for the cross. It was there, the lines forming it distinctly traceable.

Where now were the eight years? They were but a dream she had had while standing there, and from which she had just awakened, yet awakened with such lessons for future guidance! She was willing to act as they had taught her, but, oh! how she longed for her husband, for that love which thrives only with freedom, and which so knows no end."

Would she have to wait through life for that to come to her? Could she go on year after year, living her life in the lives of others, missing daily that which was for her only, content that sometime in the great for ever it should be hers?

With her finger she traced the lines of the cross, remembering that the One crucified thereon had so mastered the human consciousness with the divine that He could wait and open not His mouth.

Her example? Then surely she must work on to the same mastery.

Alone there in the silence she listened to its voice, humbly, reverently, lifting up her love beyond the senses

to the presence of the eternal I Am from this altar in the wilderness, consecrating it anew, so opening for herself that starry pathway in which she could walk, though in the world of men.

With her arms on the top of the rock, and her head bowed upon them she answered the question asked by the prophet of old, and which the silence seemed to ask of her, "Is it well with thee?" And she said, "It is well."

"Murva!"

What was that? Had she not yet finished her dream at the rock? Her breath ceased, her heart almost stood still. Slowly she raised her head, and there, standing just where he had stood eight years before, was her husband, and with his arms outstretched as then.

As her eyes met his he said, again, "Come!"

Had the long future suddenly fruited and dropped its harvest before her?

Had she not to wait because of the now?

Her husband's face was his, and yet not his. What she saw there made her nearly still heart leap within her. Slowly her arms slid down the rock, and slowly, as before, she came toward him; but not as before did he receive her.

Then he had clasped her passionately in his arms; now as she came near to him, her face answering to what she saw in his, he fell on his knees before her, and gathering the folds of her dress in his hands pressed them to his lips as her hands fell on his head.

For a moment neither spoke. Murva stood with her face raised to the blue skies above her, transfigured, glorified. Still kneeling, he raised his own and looked

at her, gathering her hands in his; and "It is the face of an angel," his thought said.

His voice broke the silence. "Lead me there with you," he said.

And she answered "Come!"

THE END.